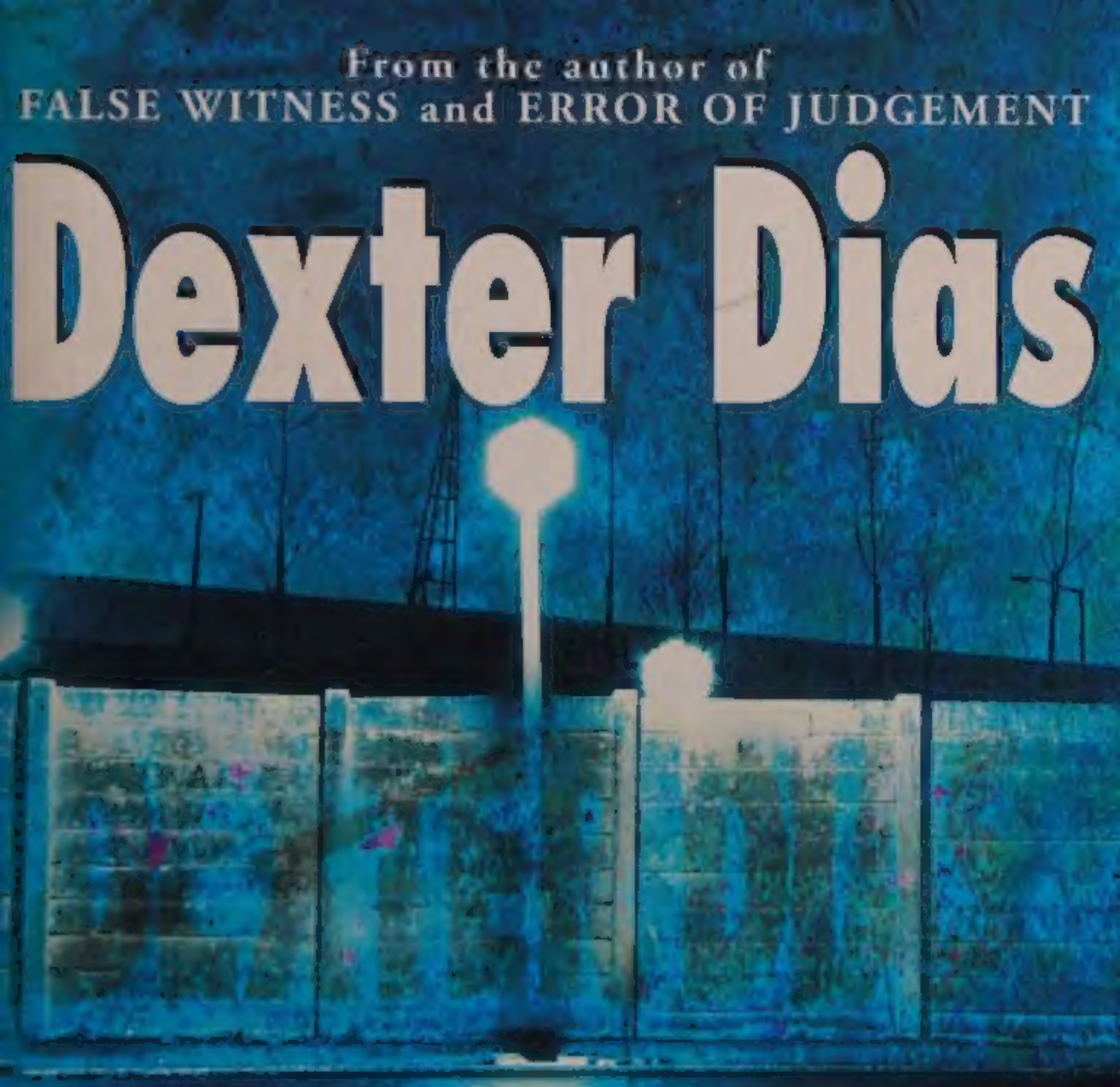
From the author of
FALSE WITNESS and ERROR OF JUDGEMENT

# Dexter Dias



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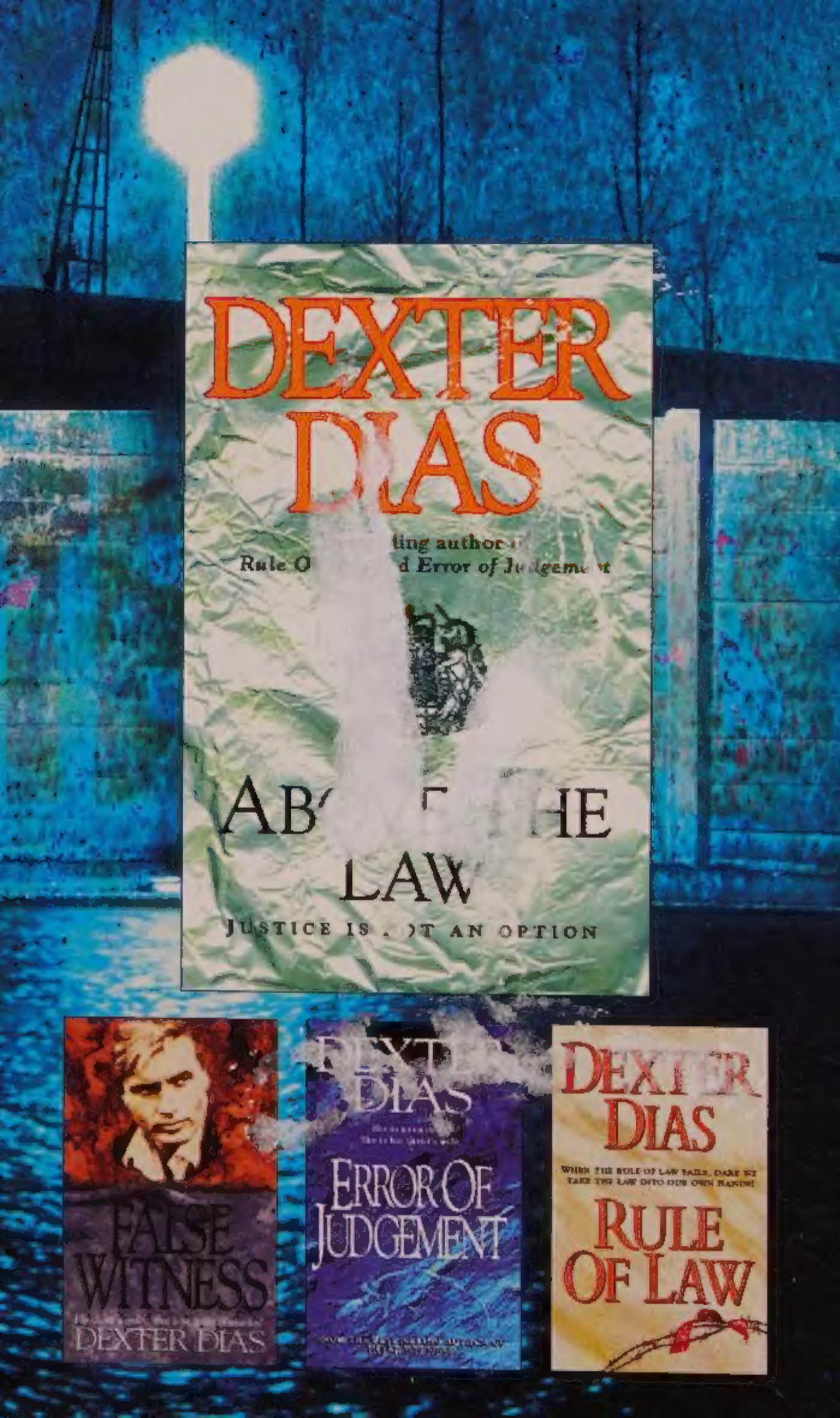
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# Power of Attorney

Dexter Dias

CORONET BOOKS
Hodder & Stoughton

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For Katie

*con amore*

And for Mike

The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway . . . 'And this also,' said Marlow suddenly, 'has been one of the dark places of the earth.'

Joseph Conrad
*Heart of Darkness*

When they return, they will make me confess.

That's what they hope.

Now they watch.

They keep me in the dark – their standard practice – and the only thing I can see is the gleam of their eyes, taking turns, peering at me from the spyhole in the door.

A point of light flares. Like a match being struck.

It disappears; flares again.

On-off, light-darkness, repeated over and over until the room is finally engulfed in brightness.

My eyes swim; I turn, trying to hide from the light, but powerful halogen spots are recessed into the ceiling in each corner. They illuminate something else: what has already happened in this cell. It is documented in cracks and dents on the walls, where men have banged their heads, kicked out with bare feet, tried to scratch through the brickwork with their fingernails. No one has escaped.

Without warning the door edges open and they step in, circling me as if I were a wild animal. They glance at each other, wait for the signal – *Go, go, go* – then pounce, restraining my arms, injecting me against infection from the river – that's what they tell me. God, it could be anything, mainlined H or codeine. I know that it's happened in police stations. The needle-tip

punches a small pit in my skin, then spears through to the subcutaneous. The plunger on the syringe slides down, and the dizziness returns. They say it is good for me. I am too weak to resist.

And still they won't tell me about Frankie.

Though my position worsens and my body fails, I am determined to surprise them all, all the police and lawyers and National Crime Squad detectives strongarming me like they're the British FBI. I will surprise them by confessing.

I will give them the one confession they won't want to hear. The true one. But not my own confession. For all I can give them is an account, *the* account, of the mystery of my brother's life and how I tried to solve it before it destroyed us all.

This is also a kind of letter to my brother. To you, Frankie, though whether you will read it – whether you can read it – I just don't know. But I want to try anyway since, out of us all, I am the only one who knows the entire story. I wish to list, to testify to, the thousand small things I never said to you.

Not huge, earth shattering things, but the personal stuff, the stuff brother never says to brother, things men are discouraged from saying to men. I loved you, and since I can remember I looked up to you, even though at times I wanted you dead.

I can hear more footsteps in the wet stone corridor outside. More of them enter the cell. I curl on the bed, bracing my body for the blows.

This is it, Frankie. They want me to tell them the truth everyone wants to hear, the one that will get everybody off the hook, me included. Everybody except you.

They want to know about the bodies.

www.boat-of-horrors.com

# Chapter One

As a wave comes to shore, so the case came to me. It came with the tide. It came slowly up the river.

Looking back seven weeks, at the meteorological report covering the night of the first murder, the weather was mainly clear, with a ten per cent chance of rain. What the report failed to mention, what I am certain of, is how the sky over the river must have looked.

I know this partly from those brief days when I partnered my father on the force and passed night patrols shooting the central arches of bridge after bridge as the city slept on both sides of our police launch. But more than this, I remember when we were still boys and Dad got his big promotion within the River Division. He smuggled Frankie and me on board one night, and no one could say anything about it since he was now in charge.

For two young boys, it was a miraculous treat. But the truth was probably that Dad couldn't get anyone to sit in with us that evening. In those days it was even harder for a lone father to bring up two kids. I remember how we squatted in the stern, just inches above the soapy wash of the craft, as the launch shot London Bridge heading downstream. On our left blinked the City of London lights. Dad explained to Frankie and me how the river was the most important part of the city, how it was its lung, an open space that allowed the rest of the metropolis to breathe.

From the river there are brief moments in the darkness when the city for all its millions of people can appear as silent and mystifying as a moonscape. That first night produced a purple-black ribbon of sky above the Thames, with just the hint of stars; lights appeared and disappeared along the opposite bank like a stir in a cloud of fireflies. The river was a darker reflection of the sky, the notorious 'black water' of the Thames with zero visibility, icy water like a floor of black glass laid through the heart of the ancient capital. There was the odd boat on the river, but I can't say I remember any in particular. Nor did I think about the boats Frankie and I had read about as boys that sailed this same river: the oared Roman galleys, the Viking dragon boats, the Crusaders' flotillas, the Victorian prison hulks.

So that evening, before the news of the murder reached us, I sat in the corner of our bar, watching the trickles of condensation as they ran down the inside of the street windows. There was the logo Dad had spent an age agonising about, now so much a part of our lives it's strange to think that Frankie and I were against it. In the centre of the logo an anchor, a suitably, if obviously, nautical image for a riverside bar. Then, in a gold-embossed arc above the anchor – though I of course looked at it back to front – the words *Pride of Kilkenny*. That was the thing Dad was most proud of in the world apart from Frankie – his bar, the Pride of Kilkenny.

Dark wood and green furnishings, brass naval ornaments, compasses, sextants, barometers, fog-lamps. Genuine working instruments Dad had once used himself or had sought out at auctions or had been left in wills. The tools men used to survive the seas and the rivers, not always successfully. Instruments that reeked of adventures won and lives lost to the water.

Behind the horseshoe bar, like a proud captain on the bridge of his ship, was Dad. Country-and-western music on the jukebox, the sweet smell of the famous Kilkenny stew, the special for the day, and every day. Dad leaned across the bar, chatting to the customers, making them feel special, that they belonged, while

Ruth worked ceaselessly around him, taking orders, pulling pints, checking that Dad's friends were occasionally even paying for their drinks. A pool table was on the left-hand side as you entered, and that's where I sat, cue in hand, waiting for my turn at the table. I looked at the river. I wondered where Frankie might be.

'Hey, David, get your scrawny butt out of that,' called Train.

Troy 'Night Train' Nelson invariably beat me at pool, mainly because he insisted that we play one hundred different permutations of the game which he claimed to have learned in the roughest boxing gyms of cities like Detroit, Chicago, New York and Atlantic City. Mostly, he was full of shit. But he was my best friend, so I let it go.

'Why is it, Train, that every time I get near winning, you invent some rule no pool player on this planet has heard of, and claim I broke it?' I asked.

He smiled his gap-toothed smile and said, "Cos I am the law, counsellor.'

'You are a cheat,' I said.

'Hey, did you hear what he called me, Ruth?'

'That's because you are a cheat,' Ruth said, handing another punter a pint jar. 'OK, gentlemen, I'm taking last orders for dinner. God knows you lot could do with some solids for a change.'

There were one or two takers, older men who habitually flirted with Ruth, wanting to show her they weren't old soaks. They were all there: Jimmy Corrigan with a lazy left eye that dripped tears when he drunkenly sang 'Danny Boy' and reached the line about summer returning to the meadows; Mick Weir and his bald bowling-ball head which he'd paint on St Patrick's Day. It was a place where you never drank by yourself, usually drank more than you intended, and soon reached a point in your life when Kilkenny's became your home from home.

'So I'm a cheat, huh?' Train said, his voice high-pitched for a man over eighteen stone, a man who had once been cited in

*Boxing Ring* magazine as being a top-twenty contender in one federation's world heavyweight category. 'Right, I want to see my lawyer now.'

'I am your lawyer, Train,' I said. 'What are we playing? Philadelphia eight-ball?'

Train laughed, his black skin covered with tiny droplets of sweat. 'No way. I told you, we're playing Prison Rules.'

Ruth passed near us, collecting empties. I watched how the denim of her jeans tightened over her thighs, how the curls of her dark hair, a legacy of her mixed Anglo-Indian background, danced around her shoulders. Her shirtsleeves were rolled up to her biceps as if she were the ex-fighter. Some of the regulars came round the pool table to watch, since 'Night Train' Nelson shooting pool was a performance worthy of his early days, when he was still climbing up the world rankings, dancing around the ring with an agility that belied his muscular bulk, mouthing off at his opponent.

I saw his last fight, of course. One dive, that's all they asked of him. Not even a proper dive. Just a falling over and a not quite beating the count. Do that and within a year he would get a shot at the number-one contender. But Train refused to fall. He won the fight. Later, they ensured that he lost his knee, or what was left of it after a sledgehammer had been at it. Months later, when he was still staggering around on a crutch, he tracked Mr Sledgehammer down to a London nightclub. Even on one leg, Train nearly killed the guy with his bare hands. He was charged with attempted murder. A bullshit overcharge by the prosecution in hope of a plea. I represented him for nothing. Got him off completely, not even a common assault. Nothing. My best day in court.

We became friends, and I even employed him as my unofficial paralegal – which basically consisted of us arguing about who would have beaten whom if we ever could have gone at it. At the age of nineteen, I was going to be the next Jake La Motta, but I was only ever light-heavy, albeit All Force Cham-

pion in my final year in the police. I mean, fighting as a police amateur against a serious pro. My head says no contest, even if I had Dad in my corner, advising me on strategy, telling me to keep jabbing. Train swore I was the most dangerous type of opponent. Little or no craft. Impervious to pain. Take a lot of blows for one killer punch. A knockout merchant. Not exactly brainy boxing. Frankie was blessed with the family brains. So everyone said; so Dad would say when he brought the ice bucket into the dressing room after a fight so I could bathe my bruised hands.

'Hey.' Train cried out, 'are you going to play this shot before they measure me for my coffin or what?'

For this, he received a suitable burst of laughter from his audience. Ruth laughed too. Just for a moment, our eyes met; she smiled at me, before disappearing into the kitchen.

I surveyed the shot on the baize. Somehow Train had jammed the cue ball in the jaws of the pocket so that the edge of the cushion blocked any direct route to the next target ball. I gazed along the top of the cue ball, along the felt, to the other end of the table. I had to laugh when Night Train dragged his body into view with his slow shuffle. His limp was always worse in the cold, and outside, the dropping air temperature would soon powder the city with a crystalline sheen.

'Hang on, Hopalong,' one of the younger cops shouted, 'don't block my view.'

I had seen this guy just a few times before. He was new to the force, intense and full of wiry energy. He was called Richards and they said he was a comer, which meant he was going places. Veteran cops used Kilkenny's as a testing-ground. Take them down Conor Kilkenny's, see if you could drink with them, learn if you could trust them to cover your back in a scrape. Richards was CID, not River, but the boys must have thought that he would be a useful ally 'on the dry', as they called land. So since Richards was new, he might not have known the history of Troy 'Night Train' Nelson. But I didn't care.

'What did you call him?' I said quietly.

The smile slowly faded from Richards's face. 'What's the problem?'

'What did you call my friend?'

'It was only a joke,' Richards said, now standing face to face with me. He was just taller than me, maybe six-two.

'Please apologise.'

'For a joke?'

'That's not funny,' I said.

'To you.'

'This is our bar. Please show family a bit of respect.'

'He's family?' Richards looked round at Train's black face. 'I thought it was a police bar,' he said. 'And the way I hear it, you're no longer on the job. You're a defence brief, aren't you? Remember how fond we are of defence briefs?'

Richards moved right into my face, and on his hot breath I could smell the cheap cigarettes he had been smoking. From his eyes, I realised that he thought he could take me.

I knew this moment, had lived it five hundred times in my youth. The point of no return. Fight or flight.

And then Train did his thing.

He sped between us with all the turbulence of a tanker coming into a small port. Both Richards and I had to move apart. Then Train began to move across the floor, dragging his right leg even more exaggeratedly than normal, the right foot flat to the ground, brushing along behind.

'See this, Conor?' he said. 'Don't need no one else to sweep the floor.' He grabbed a cloth from the bar and tossed it to the floor. He used his strong arms to lift his right leg so that the cloth was now under his foot. He shuffled along again. 'Don't need no one to mop it, neither,' he said.

People in the bar couldn't help but laugh.

He hoisted his leg on to one of the low circular tables near Richards. 'Is that a stiff leg or are you just pleased to see me?' he shouted. Now he rolled his cotton-fleece track suit back up his

leg, over his wasting calf muscles and right up to the disfigured knee. Train was breathless after the massive effort of his performance, and panted to Richards, 'There she is.'

'Jesus,' Richards said. 'I'm sorry.'

Train's features dissolved into a scowl; lines appeared on the skin between his eyebrows. 'Sorry, huh? Now you see that shit on my knee you find it in you to be sorry. Well, I don't want your sorry. I can take your laughing in my face, but I don't want your sorry. You know why? 'Cos I ain't sorry. Not one little bit. Because you know what that knee means? It means that no motherfucker owns me. No one. You hear me? No one.'

I took Train's hand. 'It's all right,' I whispered.

He exploded. 'No, it ain't all right, Davey.'

He ripped at his hooded track-suit top and pulled it quickly above his head. 'Why'd they have to do that to my knee, Davey?'

I didn't know what to say, and I wished he could have felt the love that I felt for him. But I didn't have the chance to say anything.

The door opened.

The entrant said, 'Just a quiet tale of riverside folk, then.'

If anyone else had said anything remotely like this, there would undoubtedly have been a riot or blood spilled. But standing in the doorway in his designer Italian suit was my brother.

The lines disappeared from Train's face.

'*Frankie!*' Train screamed.

He broke from my grasp and held his arms out wide until Frankie was close enough to be clamped within them, like an opponent from the old days being worked on the ropes. It was as if someone had turned up the noise in the bar again, and people began chatting and laughing and ordering drinks.

'Frankie!' Dad called, coming out from behind the bar.

I could see Frankie's face, that part of it from his nose up that appeared over Train's shoulder. From his eyes, I could tell he was smiling.

'Davey,' he said.

'Frankie,' I said back.

As boys we had been inseparable, and yet we tormented each other constantly. We didn't need any other friends, though Frankie always made them easily. It was our secret code, how we divided the world: 'There's the brothers and then there's the others.' Frankie and me.

Dad prised his elder son away from Night Train's grasp. 'Six months, you dirty stop-out,' he said, taking his turn to hug him.

'It's not six, Dad,' Frankie said.

'No, it's more.'

They hugged again, and I saw tears in Dad's eyes as he kissed Frankie on both cheeks. I was happy for the two of them, and hated myself for the twinge of jealousy I felt.

'David,' Dad said. 'Come kiss your brother.'

I stepped up slowly to Frankie and, just as I was about to hug him, he pummelled my midriff with a series of fast play-punches. My instincts took over and I covered up, then feinted right before landing a perfect left to his right cheek. Of course, it was just a slap.

'Whoa, you're getting flabby,' he said, laughing.

'Least I don't look like a refugee,' I said. I tried to find some flab to pinch on the side of his stomach. There was nothing there, just skin; my fingers felt through to his vertebrae. He's older, I thought. Not just older than me, nor older by the months he's been away, but much older. Aged.

'I've just lost a few pounds,' he said.

'See?' Dad announced to the bar. 'The only boy who lives in New York for six months and loses weight.'

I reached across and ran my fingers over Frankie's chin. 'And what the hell is that bum-fluff?' I asked.

He had the beginnings of a goatee, and a sprinkling of hair on both cheeks.

'It's fashion,' he said. 'Something you know nothing about.'

'Troy,' Dad said to Train, who had now put his top back on,

'go and get Frankie some stew, will you? David, go and get your brother our best Irish whiskey.'

'Actually,' Frankie said, taking my arm, 'I'd rather not, Dad.'

'What?' Dad demanded. 'You've not lost your appetite *and* your thirst over there?'

Frankie whispered so that only the three Kilkenny men could hear. 'I'm sort of on medication,' he said.

'What is it, son?'

'Oh, nothing. I've just got to take it a bit easy. Kind of burned the candle at both ends. Could do with some water, though.'

His eyes fixed on someone across the bar and I followed them as they settled on Ruth. Frankie walked over to her, and she rested her head on his shoulder wearily as they hugged. Of course, I watched the scene avidly, trying to pick up any nuance about how they now felt about each other, anything that would tell me whether my hopes for Ruth would be jeopardised, but their clinch was short-lived because Train soon came out of the kitchen at the back with a huge white soup bowl full of steaming stew.

When Frankie saw the piles of meat and potato and thick gravy, he said, 'Jesus, Train, I can't eat all that.'

'I'll eat the rest,' Train replied.

'Hang on,' I said to Train. 'We agreed we were in training.'

'Yeah,' he said, 'but today's a special day. Frankie's home.'

'A round of drinks on me,' Dad announced to the regulars and hangers-on.

I moved away from my brother and behind the bar. 'I'll serve, Dad,' I said. 'You talk to Frankie. Go on, now.'

Dad patted me on the back, delighted to be able to catch up with his elder son; I wondered if anyone noticed – how could they not notice? I thought – because I felt my guilt was printed all over my face. Surely Frankie only had to look at me for more than a second to know that I was in love with Ruth. It was as though I was the only fixed point in a room awash with movement: punters crowded the bar in search of the free drinks;

Frankie picked at his stew, and when he offered Ruth some with his fork she declined – I took this as a good sign; Train finally got his own plateful and heartily scooped it into his mouth like it was porridge; and Dad even broke his own rule and had a drink while he was supposed to be working, to toast the return of his elder son.

Frankie glanced over at me – my breath caught in my chest in that moment – but he said nothing and continued regaling them with financial-raider war stories of the billions of dollars made and lost in a single day in the world money markets. He winked once at me, and I supposed that he was exaggerating everything for our benefit.

And then I thought that perhaps he was winking because he had simply pulled off his old trick. He had got away with it again. He'd been away from home for six months, had not written, had barely rung, his principal mode of communication being a few brief e-mails, and he was greeted back into the bosom of our family like a conquering hero. If I missed visiting Mum's grave on just one Sunday, Dad would sulk for a month, but another set of rules applied to Frankie. As I was growing up, I always imagined that they were easier rules. But I now know that they were just different, with different pleasures and a very different set of punishments.

Later, on his way to the loo, Frankie came up to me and whispered, 'Davey, has anyone been . . . asking for me?'

'No. Who?'

'Doesn't matter,' he said. 'What was going on between Train and that bloke?'

'Richards? He's a dickhead.'

'What's he selling?'

I smiled when I heard this, because that was how Frankie divided the world, between people who were buying and those who sold. Everything to my brother was a deal, a negotiation, a sell.

'He needs to prove himself,' I said.

Frankie looked around the bar slowly. 'God, I love this place.'

'You wouldn't be seen dead in here with your business colleagues.'

'Exactly,' he said. 'Did you get my messages?'

'They were works of art. Some of the e-mails were at least five lines long.'

'I've been busy.'

'Doing what?'

We were warm inside the bar but Frankie's face was pale and he shivered. 'Nothing,' he said.

'You're up to something.'

'What, then?'

'Don't know yet. But I do know one thing,' I said. 'You're selling.'

He smiled. But I could tell – even then – that he knew. He knew they were closing in on him.

I look back now for other clues, any atom of circumstantial evidence which should have alerted me to the strange storm that would soon break over us, but can find none; I put this down to the fact that my compass was thrown both by my joy at seeing my brother again and by the simultaneous apprehension about how his return would affect Ruth and me.

# Chapter Two

I found her outside, taking her five-minute break – alone, as she preferred. She leaned against the crates of empties stacked in the alley behind the bar. For a moment I paused and watched as she puffed at a cigarette while reading a letter, the girl next door who happened to grow up with us. This image of her recurs to me: Ruth outside, the darkness bleached by neon and streetlights, a breeze from the river just taking her hair. One of the city's medieval churches sounded the hour, its high bell-tower white like bone.

'I'm not inhaling,' she said guiltily when I joined her.

'I think someone's already patented that defence.'

'I just hate smoking in front of your dad. He never says anything but I feel like I'm about thirteen again with my hair in a ponytail.'

'They're asking where you've got to.'

'I just needed a moment.'

'How'd you feel about Frankie being back?'

'How do you want me to feel?'

'Pleased. But not too pleased.'

'I think I can manage that.' She dropped the cigarette and stubbed it under her heel. 'Splitting up wasn't exactly fun. Are you OK about the great return?'

'I don't want it to affect us.'

'I didn't know there was an us.'

'Not yet. You haven't succumbed to my devious but irresistible ten-stage plan yet.'

'What stage are we on now?'

'About stage two.'

'When do we get to kiss?'

'Stage two and a half.'

She laughed and looked at me and must have seen in my eyes the concern about how things could turn out. Her laughter faded. 'It will change things,' she said.

'Jesus, Ruth, we discussed this.'

'Yes, but it's different now he's here. Now you and I are not alone. It's only been six months. Some wounds don't heal completely in six months.'

Frankie hadn't given me any real explanation about why his on-off relationship with Ruth had finally ended, but then this is not the kind of thing brother always discusses with brother. He was going to New York and he was going to have the opportunity of a lifetime. With his splitting from Ruth, I confess, I saw an opportunity of my own.

She folded the letter and put it back in its envelope, upon which I saw a blue airmail sticker.

'Letter from home,' she said.

What she called home was a place she could not even remember seeing, many thousands of miles away, a small corner of central southern India that still lived in an expat time warp, the place her father had returned to many years before.

'So is he coming this time?' I asked.

She shook her head and shrugged, trying to show that she wasn't upset.

'Ask him for the money back,' I said. She had worked hard to save the money, extra hours in the bar, and then she had sent her father the air fare so that he could visit her.

'He needs it more than me,' she said.

'No, don't do that. This is the second time—'

'Third,' she said. 'Maybe he can't bear to see me.'

'Never think that.'

I struggled to find an explanation for how a father could leave his daughter on another continent and make no effort to see her in well over a decade. 'Maybe he feels guilty,' I said.

'Let's go back in.'

The moment we returned through the kitchen doors, Dad beckoned us over, and I reminded myself that, for all the battles we'd fought, Dad was a good man. He'd brought up Frankie and me without help and had taken in Ruth as well when her father grew tired of the cold winters and frosty reception he had experienced in the Met, longing instead for his forested hill-station beat in India.

Frankie was now completing his story. 'So I said to Arnie, "Yeah, that's what I keep telling myself." And he agreed.'

Everyone laughed.

'Can I have a word?' I said.

He looked at me and knew I was serious. We reached the pool table, where the balls were still in the positions Train and I had left them in before my face-to-face with Richards.

'You were meant to come yesterday,' I said.

'I know. I'm sorry.'

'You could have called to let me know.'

'Said I'm sorry, didn't I?'

'What the hell were you doing?'

'You don't want to know.'

'Yes, Frankie, I do want to know. I wait six months to see you and then you don't show up, so I do want to know. I even phoned the bank, and they didn't know where you were.'

He looked hard at me. 'Never phone the bank,' he said.

'I tried your mobile but that was on voice mail.'

'Never phone the bank,' he repeated. He rubbed his chin; the faint beard on it made a scratching sound.

'So where were you?'

'Just business. All *très* boring. Has Ruth been saying anything about me?'

'Nothing, except she hates your guts.'

'Thanks for looking after her.'

'Who's to say I have?'

'You always look out for me, Davey.'

There was a part of me which wanted to confess then, unreservedly, because I felt I had already breached his trust by my thoughts if not my deeds – some vaguely remembered passage from catechism classes about St Matthew's warning that to think the sin was already to have committed it. If that was right, I fell asleep each night deep in sin, even if Ruth and I had not so much as kissed.

Train shouted over, 'You still ain't out of the woods on that shot, Davey.'

'Not now, Train,' I said.

'No, no, we got five on the game.'

'I don't care. You can have it.'

Frankie quickly assessed the table. I followed his eyes from my cue ball rammed in the jaws of one bag, and he correctly guessed the target ball in its impossible position along the same side of the table but at the other end. A forest of balls lay in its direct path, and the obvious escape route of the bank off the far cushion was blocked by yet another ball.

'There's a fiver on it?' Frankie asked Train. 'How about I take my brother's turn?'

'I don't care who plays the shot,' Train said. 'No one's getting out of it.'

'And just to make it interesting, why don't we drum up a little action on this?'

At the sound of a serious bet going down, punters crowded around the table. Frankie took out his calfskin wallet. 'Five hundred says I can make the shot,' he said. 'Anyone want a piece of it?'

Men looked at each other; Mick Weir and Jimmy Corrigan

whispered out of the sides of their mouths. It was an impossible shot, and soon a number of them had laid their money down against Frankie's.

'Davey, lend us five hundred quid.' Frankie said, but before I could tell him where to get off, he produced ten crisp fifty-pound notes from his wallet.

No one else had a fifty, so there was a scruffy pile of fives and tens and the odd twenty against Frankie's pristine notes. The bet was on, and I had lost the opportunity to take my brother to one side and tell him that I was deeply in love with his ex-girlfriend.

'I'll keep the stakes,' Ruth said, scooping up all the money.

'Why you?' Train asked.

'Who else're you going to trust in a bar full of cops?' she replied.

Frankie took off his jacket and handed it to me. Beneath he wore a powder-blue brushed-cotton shirt with double cuffs. 'Cue?' he asked, as a surgeon asks for a scalpel. 'Right, I'm allowed one practice,' he said.

This brought a wail of protest from the other gamblers.

'My, some people aren't too confident of their money, are they? Just joking, gentlemen.' He gestured me to go with him to the first pocket. We went into a huddle and whispered.

'What's your plan?' I said.

'Fuck knows.'

I looked at him horrified. 'Frankie, you've bet five big ones on this shot.'

'Jesus, it's only money. Look at the fun everyone's having.'

'I think I spotted one shot,' I told him. 'But it's got to go off three cushions.'

'I've got another idea,' he said.

I was still standing close when he arched his fingers into a high bridge so that the cue could stab down on the ball from almost vertically above like a spear. And then I saw, just momentarily, no more than a millimetre's contact, how the tip of his thumb brushed fractionally against the cue ball.

'All I'm going to need is a lot of spin,' he said, withdrawing immediately.

No one else had seen.

But I had.

And I knew that it was already a foul stroke. I knew that my brother, for all his showmanship, had already lost his bet. So why hadn't I told anyone? He gazed at me steadily with his strangely blue eyes, and he knew that I knew, and he knew that I would never tell.

The crowd had begun a slow handclap. Frankie took a shallow bow to laughter and jeers, jeers from those who had laid down their money.

He went back to the pocket and again formed the high-fingered bridge, his fingers splayed out over the pocket like a spider. The cue-tip rocked up and down two inches above the cue ball. He took a sharp breath. Held it. Then there was a snap as the cue stabbed down and the ball hurtled off.

To everyone's amazement, not along the felt of the table, but into the air. Across and over the maze of balls, until it plummeted down on the other side of the table and hit the far side cushion, spun on itself and reversed its direction, spinning on the same spot before accelerating off straight at the object ball and pocketing it.

The bar broke into chaos at the miraculous shot. Frankie lofted the cue in triumph. People were whooping and clapping and cheering. It was only me, as if immune to the delirium by virtue of my knowledge of Frankie's foul, who had the presence of mind to notice that half a dozen uniformed men had entered the bar.

Frankie came up and hugged me.

'You know,' he whispered.

I nodded.

'I'm going to give them their money back, but I just want to enjoy this for a moment. Will you let me?'

I nodded again.

I realise now that Frankie lived for such fleeting moments of adoration and approval, that his life was constructed piece by piece of such fragile building blocks. In part it was a function of being the elder child. But that's not the complete answer. I think Frankie played these games in public because he didn't like to be by himself, because when he looked inside he was frightened by what he saw.

Ruth came over with the fistfuls of cash. 'Holder keeps ten per cent, doesn't she?' she said.

'Better give it all back,' Frankie said.

'What?' Dad asked, confused. 'You won, son.'

'I fouled,' Frankie admitted. 'My thumb touched the cue ball.'

So he was applauded for his honesty as well as for his shot-making brilliance even as one of the new arrivals said, 'We're looking for Francis Kilkenny.'

'Why?' I said.

There was silence, broken finally by three softly spoken words. 'Suspicion of murder.'

I still like to think that Frankie would have owned up to the foul even if I hadn't seen it.

# Chapter Three

Following hard on the heels of the uniforms were a couple of suits. One of them had round steel-and wire glasses and pinched features, as though his shirt collar were one size too small. He introduced himself as DCI Leybourne. Dad went up to him, all smiles, and with a 'let's sort this out between old mates' attitude.

'I'm Conor Kilkenny,' he said.

'I know who you are,' Leybourne replied. 'I'm looking for Francis Kilkenny.'

Instinctively, I stood in front of Frankie, and Train joined me. No one else in the room was about to give Frankie up before they had heard what it was all about. There was a camaraderie among the River Division that was the envy of the rest of the force. I learned from my time on the water that the woodentops on land were just policing people. But we were also policing the river. They say the human body is ninety per cent water; when you fish someone out of the water after they have been keeping the 110 species of fish company for a while, you realise that our remaining ten per cent amounts to very little indeed. So we ride along the top of it in our little craft and we get along fine with each other. It's a sort of secret that binds the division together. I remembered the new face, Richards, and worried he might mouth off about Frankie. But when I spotted him sitting at a table near the wall, I was amazed to see Ruth right beside him

with her arm around his shoulders, whispering into his ear. Richards's eyes met mine and I knew that he would leave it up to us.

'What's this about murder?' I asked.

'We'll tell Mr Kilkenny when we find him.'

'You can tell me first,' I said. 'I'm David Kilkenny, his lawyer.'

'If you know where he is, you'd better tell me, or you're obstructing justice.'

'You're suggesting there's a duty for a brief to give up his client? Which law is that?'

'Well . . .' Leybourne began to bluster, his bluff called.

'Name me the authority. I'd love to hear it,' I said. 'Or perhaps you should admit in front of your subordinates that you don't know what you're talking about.'

'Look,' Dad said, 'we're all on the same side here, boys. Give us your number and we'll get Francis to contact you.'

Frankie had been in little bits of minor trouble all his life. Not with the law outright – with car repos on unpaid leases, getting his phone cut off, that kind of thing. Dad or I had always bailed him out.

'How can I help you?' Frankie said quietly behind us.

'Are you Francis Kilkenny?' Leybourne asked.

'Yes. What is it about?'

'The yacht.'

The moment I heard this, my cheeks flushed, and I was the one who felt guilty.

'Which yacht?' Frankie asked.

'The one you hired for the bank,' Leybourne replied.

'So? It was corporate entertaining for an important client, that's all.'

'Well, that boat's burned to a crisp,' said Leybourne.

'Contact the insurers,' I told him.

'And we've found a body on it,' Leybourne said. 'A mutilated body. Shall we contact the insurers about that?'

I watched Frankie here. There was not the slightest flicker of recognition. But nor was there denial or shock or surprise.

'Oh, Jesus,' Dad said.

'Are you sure it's the same boat?' I asked. 'The *Corinth*, wasn't it, Frankie?'

'David, how do you know about this?' Dad said.

'Frankie phoned a couple of days ago and asked for somewhere to impress a client.'

Frankie put his arms on Dad's shoulders. 'Everything's OK. I'll go and sort things out with these . . . gentlemen.'

'But it's nothing to do with you,' Dad said.

'It's OK.'

I said, 'I'm going with you.'

'He doesn't need a lawyer,' Leybourne said.

'Right, I'm definitely going.'

Frankie slipped on his suit jacket and dusted it down, while Dad stood near by helpless, beside himself with worry. I went to grab my leather jacket from behind the bar, but Ruth stood in front of me, her eyes searching mine.

'What's the matter?' she asked.

'Frankie's in trouble. And I want to help him. But I keep thinking I want to kiss you. What kind of a person does that make me?'

'Sometimes, David, you frighten me. Always trying to work out the right thing to do.'

'I wish I could just kiss you right here.'

'And you know what would happen?'

'What?'

'Nothing. Except the skies would part and a plague would be visited on our house and we'd be zapped into pillars of salt.'

'I'm trying to cut down on salt,' I said. 'What was it you said to Richards?'

'He was very nice about it really. Especially when I told him that if he breathed a word about Francis I would personally tear off his testicles and grind them in the waste disposal unit.'

'Shy and retiring to the end,' I said.
'That's me,' she replied.

The knot of uniforms stood around the three police vehicles, but Frankie took his time, inhaled deeply, his head slightly arching back at the neck. He stretched his arms, and the moonlight caught his face.

'River looks great tonight,' he said.

'Not if you're on a burning yacht,' Leybourne said, adjusting his glasses.

The wind swept up the city's great artery, tanged faintly with salt, though the sea lay miles beyond. Sometimes the river smelled metallic, like water drawn from a rusting pipe; other times it was vegetal, emitting the odour of rotting leaves and algae and damp winter bonfires.

'How badly is it gutted?' Frankie asked.

'You tell me,' Leybourne said.

'I was only asking.'

'As if you didn't know.'

'He doesn't,' I said.

Leybourne nodded. But it wasn't a nod of agreement. It was the kind that suggested a confidence that the truth would finally come out anyway, no matter what anyone might say now. 'Put it this way,' the DCI continued, 'it won't be featured in *Yachting Monthly*.'

'Or perhaps it will,' Frankie said.

Frankie and I sat side by side behind the grille that divided front from back. I was closer to the water and gazed into its swell, not now one river but many crowding within the concreted banks. In places streams coiled and turned like snakes, and there were areas of stillness all around where the surface was flat and impenetrable, like a black hole in space. The flashing lights of the three-car convoy created red-and-blue pyrotechnics in the glass fronts of the empty office blocks, and the effect was like the

swinging of a watch before the eyes. My thoughts drifted with the tide, and I remembered again that Catholic summer camp I had tried so hard to forget, and the last time Frankie and I were in the back of a police vehicle together.

Camp rules were that we slept three per tent and had a roster of duties that ranged, bizarrely now I think about it, from slopping out the latrines to going into the ring to box against a priest to serving at Mass.

Frankie and I shared with Morton – his first name was Chris, but everyone always used his surname – who was at our Catholic School, St Joseph's, and was the 'keeper in the school football team. At the end of the first week, on a blinding afternoon, I saw Frankie on a rowing-boat in the centre of the lake, surrounded by pine forests. The sun bounced off the water, and I could not make out who was in the stern of the boat with him. But as the boat turned with the water, I saw that it was Morton. This annoyed me, since each boy was allowed only one half-hour trip out in the boat per week, such was its popularity, and Frankie had promised to take me. My anger soon vanished.

Morton pitched off the side of the boat and into the water.

For a moment Frankie sat motionless. Then he started screaming.

I kicked off my shoes and dived in from the bank. It was high summer, but the water froze me, like a cold-steel clamp tight around my chest. I could not breathe, but my feet managed to kick me away from land towards my brother. I splashed with my legs, pounded with my arms. My head snapped backward in pain as it struck the underside of the boat. My mouth filled with brackish water. Frankie's hand reached down, pulled me part way out of the lake. I draped my arms over the side of the boat.

'Where?' I gasped.

'I don't know,' he said.

I spun my head around, my eyes just inches above the surface

of the lake. I couldn't see Morton anywhere. I looked up at Frankie again and took a deep breath.

'No,' he cried.

But I had to try.

I plunged into the black water.

I forced my eyes open under the surface and the water stung them. I stretched my hands out in front of me, as if I were lurching around a coal cellar, until I found him. I didn't understand at first. He was standing to attention at the bottom of the lake, his young body upright in the water, his mane of blond hair drifting around his face like seaweed, his arms outstretched. I wrapped my arms around his midriff, but he would not move.

His right foot, which had booted so many goal kicks for St Joseph's, was trapped in a tangle of rusted metal on the bottom of the lake. There were prams down there, and bikes, and fridges without their doors. The lake was a graveyard for defunct household appliances, and Morton was anchored to one of them. I struggled with my fingers, felt the flesh around his thin ankles, worked him free. His body rose above me, slowly and smoothly, but I knew he was dead. I saw the underside of his shoes above my head. My breath was practically used up, and I realised I was stuck.

The water filled my lungs. I felt death reaching down inside me; the water tasted sweet.

I was suddenly on the lakeside.

The sun pierced my burning eyes.

Father McCory pumped the water out of my mouth.

No one was ever sure why Morton dived out of the boat with his clothes and shoes on. Frankie told the priests and then the detectives who took a statement from him that he just didn't know. He said that the cop had read out some legal jargon, a kind of oath, and had asked him if he realised what it meant.

'That I've got to tell the truth,' Frankie replied.

'That you'll go to hell if you don't,' Father McCory told him.

When Frankie told me this later that night, he laughed and said, 'Yeah, like I care.'

I cried myself to sleep because I thought that my elder brother was going to hell and then I would be alone for ever.

After morning Mass, dedicated to Morton's memory, all sorts of rumours sprang up about us. Everything from the obviously homicidal ones to Frankie being the Prince of Darkness. Frankie liked that. I began to get into fights, defending him, and the priests wanted to put us in separate tents on opposite sides of the lake. When the homosexual taunts finally began, we had both had enough. We ran away.

We didn't know where we were going, escaping in the darkness, deeper into the woods. The name of the place, Gosburn, stirred Frankie's imagination, and he told me as we ran through the night that in fact the town was called Ghostburn, and that these very woods were haunted. Not by normal ghosts, but by the ghosts of children who had died before their time. I remember that he wound me up so much that I burst into tears and begged Morton's ghost, who I was convinced lurked behind every other pine tree, not to murder us, and to forgive me for taking so long to find his body under the water.

Frankie relented. He stroked my hair, and I can still feel his fingers moving through the knotted strands. 'Don't worry,' he said. 'There are no such things as ghosts.'

'There aren't?' I asked.

'You live and then you die,' he said.

Finally, we found a cottage hidden by trees, beyond a field full of sheep. There were no lights, and we rang the bell to check it was unoccupied. Frankie made me give him one of my T-shirts from the small rucksack that bobbed behind me. He used it to wrap a stone from the flower-bed and expertly smashed the glass in the kitchen door.

I don't think I can ever remember a more joyous meal than the one I had with my brother that night. Eating cold baked beans out of a can and chewing on chunks of Spam, and Frankie

telling me stories about our mother. I know now that he was lying; she had died giving birth to me and he could only have been about two.

We fell asleep, happy and safe and together.

I was woken by a vicious tug on my hair from a uniformed policeman. A police car took us back to the camp, where we were condemned to say Our Fathers, Hail Marys and Glory Be's for hours on our knees.

Frankie never did tell me what really happened in that boat with Morton.

Ten minutes after leaving Kilkenny's we arrived at a huge steel tower fronted with reflective glass, Renaissance concrete rustication at the bottom, an oriental-style atrium at the top. Eclectic in design. Messy. Like criminal justice.

'Why here?' I asked Leybourne.

We left the vehicle and approached the intimidating building.

'NCS jurisdiction,' he replied.

Frankie looked at me. 'NCS?'

I glanced back at him, his dark hair, thicker than mine, buffeted by the wind spilling off the river behind him, while his face was intermittently illuminated by the blocks of yellow light from the tower in front.

'National Crime Squad,' I said. 'Don't worry.'

Frankie and I were being taken to the British FBI.

# Chapter Four

We went in through the front entrance of the NCS building. A good sign. They were not taking Frankie to the custody suite at the back; there was no booking in, no triggering of 'relevant times' for custody time limits. In theory, he was free to go whenever he wished. In theory. After flashing past the front desk, where a bored woman PC stood behind a counter, we were guided into a lift with thick metallic doors and mirrors around the inside.

Frankie turned to me. 'Ruth looked beautiful, didn't you think?'

'She always does,' I said.

'She's still angry with me. Do you think I made a mistake?'

'No.'

As soon as I said it, I felt a knot in my stomach; I wondered whether my job was not only to protect my brother from the police but also to ensure that he and Ruth would not get back together. Unbidden plans and schemes appeared in my mind. I tried to concentrate on the case, hoping my darker thoughts would vanish. I loved my brother. I didn't want to hurt him. But what were we going to do about Ruth?

The doors glided apart and we found ourselves high above the city. Around me, the large investigations floor was open plan, with little clusters of desks and VDUs. Along the walls were the

interview rooms. Maybe two dozen cops were at work, mainly plainclothes, and the entire floor fell silent as we moved through it.

Leybourne led the way. A uniform opened the wooden-and-glass door of the farthest interview room and we were suddenly cocooned. There was a table pushed against the wall with two chairs on either side. Leybourne sat opposite Frankie, while I stood at Frankie's side, and DS Owens, a round, balding man, stood opposite me. Duellists and their seconds.

'We're free to walk right out of here?' I asked.

'It would go better for you if you stayed,' Owens said, never taking his eyes off Frankie.

I noticed that the tape-recording machinery was set up. 'Well, I want everything recorded, then.'

'It's just a little chat among friends,' Leybourne said.

'So there should be no problems recording it,' I pointed out.

'I'm not a great fan of records,' Frankie said. He tried to put on his winning smile.

Then I knew he was frightened.

'Well, I'm going to take a few notes,' I said. 'For my own purposes. Only I haven't brought any—'

'DS Owens,' Leybourne said. 'Please find some writing materials for . . . counsel here.'

'I'm not counsel,' I said to Leybourne. 'I've left the Bar.'

Leybourne feigned surprise. 'Oh, that's right. Yes, they told me. You left the police and then left the Bar.'

He left the comment hanging and Frankie took the bait. 'So you know a little about David?'

'Not as much as I know about you.' Leybourne stood, took off his glasses, closed his eyes and rubbed them. 'But we'll come to you, Francis. Yes, I just forgot that your brother David here is a bit of a lone gunman these days.'

'It's got nothing to do with anything here,' I said.

Leybourne replaced his glasses and looked down at me. 'How

is old Sean Sullivan these days? I heard they were going to declare him bankrupt until you bailed him out.'

I went to the Bar when I finished my law degree simply because it offered the quickest route to 'getting on my feet' in the criminal courts and giving the force a taste of their own medicine. But I could not abide the pomp and ceremony of the 'straight' Bar, and I could never get into the so-called 'radical' sets of chambers with my police background. So I joined a small solicitors' firm, run by one Sean Sullivan, who also dabbled on the murky fringes of fight promotion and represented small-time boxers in contractual disputes. I was taken on as what is called an 'in-house advocate'. I was competent to appear in all courts since I had been called to the Bar, and there was the added advantage for Sean that I could check out a boxer and tell him whether the guy had a glass jaw. Then Sean staked everything he had trying to promote a championship rematch, but when the fight fell through because one of the boxers failed a drugs test he was ruined financially.

'I hear in Sullivan & Co., you are the Co. Everyone else has left,' Leybourne said.

Owens returned at that moment so I didn't have to reply to the taunt, which happened to be true.

'Right,' Leybourne told Frankie, 'your turn.'

He pulled some folded notes from an inside pocket. I could make out spidery scribblings on the paper but could not discern any words.

'Your name is Francis Kilkenny?' Leybourne asked. 'And you work for – ignore my accent – the Basle & Berne Bank?'

'Yes,' Frankie said.

'Or is it,' Leybourne continued, still reading, 'the Zurich Chemical Bank?'

'Yes,' Frankie said.

'Well, which is it?'

'Both. It's very simple. And complicated at the same time.'

'Why don't you enlighten us?' Owens suggested, still standing.

'Well, BBB owns ZCB, but ZCB in turn owns some other . . . entities, which in turn own BBB. Something like that.'

'Sounds bent to me,' Owens said.

'Ah, that's because you're not *au fait* with the intricacies of the world of high finance, DS Owens.'

'No, I'm not,' Owens said.

Their taunting routine was eating away at my patience. 'What's all this got to do with the burning yacht?'

Leybourne spread out the piece of paper.

It was a sheet of A4 that had been folded into quarters, and on the reverse side was a printed pro forma document, which had been faxed.

Leybourne pushed the paper across the table to Frankie. 'Seen that before?' he asked.

It was a lease-hire agreement from a luxury yachting company.

'Yes,' Frankie said, and I noticed a trickle of sweat tracking down the vein that runs from hairline to the temple.

Frankie had signed the document.

'So you can confirm that this yacht, the *Corinth*, was hired on behalf of your bank, by you?' Leybourne asked.

'You've known that since back in the bar,' I said. 'Now what do you allege my brother has to do with the fire on the yacht?'

'We don't want to ask him about that,' Leybourne said.

'Not at the moment,' Owens added.

'We don't even want to ask him about the body we found on the boat,' Leybourne said.

I looked at Frankie. His manicured right hand came up and wiped the bead of sweat away from his forehead.

On cue, Leybourne said, 'We want to ask him about the man who survived.'

# Chapter Five

There was a sharp knock on the glass door; I glimpsed a familiar face through it.

'DI Ellen Ross entering the interview room,' she said as she came in.

'We're not recording,' Leybourne announced.

'Jesus,' she said. Leybourne was her superior officer, but she seemed not to care.

'And it's not an interview, Ellen,' I told her.

She stared at me with her grey-green eyes. 'Trust a bloody lawyer to get technical on us.'

'You know her?' Frankie asked.

'In another life,' I said.

On the one hand I was genuinely pleased to see her. It had been a long time. On the other, if she was annoyed that the questioning was not being recorded and was even prepared to express that to a superior, then I knew that things had to get worse for Frankie.

'There's a call for you, DCI Leybourne,' Ellen said.

'Not now,' he replied.

Ellen lowered her voice. 'I think it's . . . personal. She said it's urgent.'

Leybourne's face grew pale and he moved to the door.

'Can I borrow you in the meantime?' Ellen asked me. 'Come

on, Killer, I'll ask DS Owens here to get your brother a nice cup of National Crime Squad tea and truth drug while he's waiting.'

'You're on, so long as no one's in the room with him while I'm away,' I said.

'Deal,' Ellen said. Her bob of coppery red hair clung to her nape as she walked away, not looking back, confident that I would be in her wake.

I pointed my finger at Frankie. 'You, say nothing,' I instructed him.

'OK, counsellor,' he said in mock obedience. As I reached the door, he added, 'Killer?'

'Long story,' I replied.

Ellen led the way to a deserted service corridor behind two reinforced-glass swing-doors, leaving a hint of perfume in her wake. She was just over five-ten and sleek with it, despite the fact that she ate constantly and drank as much as any of the men at basic training.

Ellen and I came first and second in our class. She nicknamed me Killer, Killer Kilkenny, not because of my boxing but because I would wake up in the middle of the night and be up for it, which to her was a real killer. The word in the canteens was that Ellen Ross must do it like a rabbit. In fact she was slow and deliberate and tender, and this made me feel guilty, though I never told her, since when I woke in the night I was thinking of Ruth. Of the many reasons we recruits trotted out for joining the police, I liked Ellen's the best. While others spoke of the excitement or money or power, or even the uniform, Ellen calmly explained that she joined because she could do better. Her family had been badly let down by the police and she believed she could do better.

'Nice to see you dressing up for the occasion,' she said, eyeing my jeans and jacket.

'It's the height of fashion in all the courts.'

'You're still full of shit, then, Killer,' she said.

'Yeah, people don't change.'

'I have. I'm over you.'

She crossed her arms tightly across her chest, and stood with her feet pointing slightly apart, a trained dancer who could do some serious damage.

'How'd you get in?'

'The usual,' she said casually. 'Extortion and blackmail.'

'And why've you got the yacht case?'

'Piss-poor luck. As usual.'

'So what's the story?' I asked. 'My brother signed the lease-hire for a little corporate hospitality. The yacht burns. One man dies. One man lives. Messy. But hardly NCS territory.'

'Ah,' was all she said to that. She ran both her hands through her hair, then shook her head. 'Didn't Leybourne tell you?'

'DCI Leybourne to you.'

'Oh, he's a dickhead on temp secondment. He's not NCS staff.'

'Where's he based?'

'Stories vary.'

'What hasn't Leybourne told me?'

'Mr Survivor is downstairs. And in his pocket are two business cards. One of them has . . . well, I can't wait to hear what your brother has to say about that.'

'All right. Between friends. What will it take for Frankie to walk out?'

She tried to control the beginnings of the smile that was gnawing away at her mouth. She wanted to enjoy this; she had me where she wanted me, and was feeling good. We passed Leybourne, who was in heated conversation on the phone. He stopped when he saw us.

'Poor bastard,' Ellen whispered to me. 'His daughter.'

'Wanting to borrow the car?'

Ellen hesitated, then said, 'Took some tabs of Ecstasy at a rave. Still in hospital.' We started back, walking a few paces in

silence. 'You're not still obsessed with your brother's girl, are you?'

'It's complicated.'

Ellen seemed pleased at this. It was as if she were thinking: Well, your obsession with her ruined us, so it's only fair that it appears to have messed you up.

'Any ID on the body?' I asked, wanting to change the subject.

She paused and stared at me, though I couldn't tell if she was not allowed to tell me or if she didn't want me to know for my own good.

She opened the door and I saw Frankie alone inside, seated in the same chair, staring down at the coffee rings on the table. He half got up when he saw me and tried to smile.

'I think your brother's got some questions for you,' Ellen said.

We found ourselves alone, on opposite sides of the table. Frankie was about to speak when I put a finger to my lips, and hoped he understood that the room was probably bugged.

'Ruth looked beautiful, didn't you think?' I said to him, repeating his own words from the lift.

'She always does,' he replied.

He understood.

'Wait,' I mouthed, and he nodded.

We waited for perhaps two minutes in total silence, though it seemed much longer. With most people this would have been awkward. But Frankie and I had shared a bedroom for years, and I remembered the times late into the night when his restless mind simply could not shut off and he kept me awake with wild stories of far-off places and do-or-die adventures.

Before long, a scouting party was sent to see what we were up to. Owens returned to the room with a Styrofoam cup of coffee cradled in his fat fingers. A little of it had spilled and dribbled across the back of his hand.

'We only had Coffeemate, Mr Kilkenny,' Owens said to Frankie. I sensed a minute adjustment in his tone.

'I'll live,' Frankie replied.

Owens put the cup down on the table. 'So you really think those bonds?' he asked.

'Definitely,' Frankie told him. 'A little certainty in an uncertain world.'

'The missus thinks ISAs.' Owens said.

Frankie smiled. 'I bet she bought Betamax as well.'

Owens gave a short laugh, then quickly glanced over his shoulder through the open door to check if anyone was watching. 'Right, I'll leave you both to it, then.'

'What the hell were you doing?' I asked when we were alone.

'He wanted a little free financial advice.'

'You've been hauled in on a murder inquiry and you're trying to sell some junk?'

Frankie went into Oscar Wilde mode. 'Dear boy, do give me credit for being beyond selling junk.'

'Then what do you sell, Frankie?' The second I said it, I caught myself. I held up my hand to shut him up, but there was no need. Frankie was in total control.

'DI Ross,' I called across the open-plan. Ellen emerged from a room on the opposite wall, file in hand, as if she were utterly uninterested in what Frankie and I were up to.

As she made her way over, I glanced at Frankie. 'Where'd a cop like that get enough money anyway?'

He shrugged. 'Frankie's First Law,' he said. 'Never ask the punter where he got his dosh.'

I raised an eyebrow.

'Only kidding,' he said.

'He needs to go to the loo,' I told Ellen.

She led us out into the corridor again, where the men's and women's were side by side. I looked at her, then knocked hard on the door, the women's door. 'Anyone home?' I called, and opened it slightly.

There was no response.

'In there,' I said to Frankie.

'You can't,' Ellen protested.

'Arrest me,' I said. Frankie slipped past us and inside. 'Guard the door, Elles,' I said, disappearing after him.

'I opened one of the cubicles, held the door open, waited until he entered. I pushed him down on the closed loo seat. Then I joined him, standing in the space between his splayed legs. I pulled the chain. Then leaned right by his ear and whispered, 'Who was on the boat?'

'Have they mentioned Casas?'

'What?'

'Who,' he said. 'The client was Casas.'

'There's one dead and one alive. The live one has your business card.'

Frankie paused. 'That could be Casas.'

The cistern had refilled sufficiently for the sound of water to have diminished to a trickle. I went to the sinks and put my hands under the two automatic dryers; they both roared.

'What do I do?' Frankie whispered in my ear.

'Say nothing,' I replied. 'You know nothing, you've done nothing.'

He nodded and we went to the door. As I opened it, he looked at me with the same look he'd worn when we were kids and the police had finally caught up with us in the cottage.

'I really haven't,' he said.

'OK.' I nodded.

Ellen was waiting outside in the corridor, arms tightly crossed over her chest.

'I'm advising my client to say nothing further. So we can go?'

'I should think you'd definitely want to go,' she said. 'I can't think you'd want to stay here a moment longer. Especially now that we've ID'd the body, Dave. I mean, what is any of this to you? Off you go. Back to the happy family bar, while we try to

discover why the dead man on the yacht your brother hired was a cop.'

My eyes fixed on Ellen's and I knew she was not lying. I looked at Frankie and he glanced down.

'Oh, yes,' she continued, 'and the survivor? Latin American. Calls himself Casas. Refuses to see any lawyer. So go home, Killer, this is nothing to do with you.'

'Who's the cop?' I asked.

'No comment.'

I looked at Ellen for a long time and then said, 'The prisoner's got no lawyer?'

# Chapter Six

Ten minutes later Frankie and I left the police station. Although there had been no formal booking procedure when we arrived, now that we had walked right out of the murder investigation notes were being made, times checked, and messages filed on the HOLMES computer, the Home Office Large/Major Enquiry System. We were bound to be followed. In police terms, they were letting us 'run'. Ply the criminal associates with a few scraps of information and then see who they run to. It usually worked.

We reached the waterside. There was a low wall dividing the road from the river and I noticed that there was no wet mark on it. The tide was coming in from the sea, all the way up the estuary and right through the capital. The river was tidal to Teddington. Originally it was called Tide End Town, Dad told me when I joined the River Division.

Frankie studied me before he spoke. 'Are you going back in there?' he finally said.

'You heard what Ellen said. Your client Casas—'

'He's not my client, he's the bank's.'

'OK, the bank's client Casas hasn't got anyone in there. Believe me, they'll be able to make him say anything.'

'Even the truth?' Frankie asked.

'Sometimes.'

'Then I've got nothing to worry about.' He added, 'Especially if you're going to be there to represent him.'

'You want me to go back?'

It seemed to me that Frankie didn't hear what I said, or simply didn't wish to hear. He stared out at the river and said after a while, 'Best beat in the city, son.'

Dad's words.

Every morning the river had taken Dad away from us, and then in the evenings it would ferry him home. For kids living in one of the most concreted parts of the city, this tidal life was an extraordinary thing. Most of the kids at the junior school around the corner from our Cable Street home hated the police. I could understand this. The police harassed many of their fathers: arguments with the mothers after the men had drunk the week's wages on a Friday night, being picked up D&D, drunk and disorderly, passing dud cheques, knocking out bits and pieces of stolen goods – nothing major, but the kind of thing that could make ends meet.

'Frankie, the truth is I need the case.'

'Why?'

'The coffers are kind of running low.'

'I could sub you some.'

'Thanks, but I'm going to make this bloody legal practice work if it kills me. A case like this, a headlining murder, would keep me afloat.'

'What's Dad going to say? You representing a cop-killer.'

'A suspected one,' I said.

'Think Dad will see that difference?'

'Probably not. But it would gain me some credibility with clients.'

'You mean criminals.'

'What am I supposed to do? I can't join the CPS and work with the Met every day. And criminal clients are wary – they're right to be wary of an ex-cop.'

'So the case will set you up?'

'It'll help. Anyway, Casas might not see me. He's refused all other briefs.'

'When he hears your name, he'll see you,' Frankie replied. He took my arm. 'What happened when you left the force, that was terrible. We both know that. But I was on your side, remember? I'll help you out with money.'

'I want to pay my own way.'

'Always Mr Independent.'

'Tell Dad I've got another client.'

'Do I tell him about the dead cop?'

'Up to you,' I said.

'I'm not telling him about any dead cop,' he said. He checked his wallet, then looked at me. 'I know things are tight – but that bet cleared me right out of readies.'

'Jesus, Frankie, you shouldn't have put five hundred on it, should you?' I said, handing him two crumpled tens. 'Go straight to the bar and stay there, OK? No free financial advice to overweight cops, no hiring of burning boats.'

'OK, OK.' He paused, and his eyes became distant, as if he were trying to remember something he had been meaning to tell me. 'Have you noticed anything funny with Ruth?'

'What do you mean?' I asked, though I guessed exactly what he was talking about.

'Dad said in one of his letters that she goes off for hours and then is sheepish about where she's been. You don't think she's seeing someone else, do you?'

I guiltily recalled the clandestine dates Ruth and I had had, when I had pretended to Train that I had been called out on a case and she pretended to Dad that she was seeing a girlfriend. I'm convinced that neither of us had intended anything to develop. No, that's not exactly true; secretly I wished that she would begin to see me as more than Frankie's younger brother, but I promised myself that I wouldn't try to get closer until she told me that the relationship with Frankie was over for good. She told me this on our third meeting, when she suggested

a walk along the towpath near Barnes Bridge. She showed me a colony of wild green parrots.

'I haven't seen her with anyone else. Of course, we've had the odd drink.'

'Yeah, thanks for that,' he said.

'Anyway, I thought it was over between you two.'

He clamped his arm around my shoulders in a big-brother way. 'Davey, relationships like that are never quite over.'

I didn't want to talk about it any more, hoping irrationally that if we didn't discuss it the problem might go away. 'Where are you staying?' I asked.

'The Dorchester,' he said. 'But I was wondering—'

And before I knew it, Frankie was walking away with most of my cash, my office and flat keys, and towards Ruth. He hesitated after about ten paces, and half turned.

'Good to be home,' he said.

'Don't nick my bed. You've got the bloody sofa. And Train's in the spare room.'

'Yes, boss. Anything you say, boss.'

'Get out of my sight.'

And he did.

At least he would have, if I had not waited until he turned the corner to his left and then pounded as fast as I could along the street after him. I cannot say exactly why I did it, but my throat was dry, and I knew there was unfinished business. I felt like the little brother who keeps trying to tag along while the big boys are up to mischief I wasn't supposed to know about.

When he heard the heavy footsteps thudding along the dark road behind him, he spun around, startled. It was as if he were expecting someone to be after him. There was an alley to one side, with freebie newspapers plastered against walls by the wind and sodden in puddles, and overflowing with black refuse sacks. I grabbed him, realising how wasted away he was, and propelled him back into the alley. He struggled a little and then ceased, and

I knew again what I had always known, that physically I could damage my brother badly if it came to it.

I remembered when he was about to go to university and he told me he had kissed Ruth for the first time. I said nothing, no words of congratulation or disapproval. But I bided my time. I picked a fight with him the next week, about something trivial, money he owed me, something he had borrowed and not returned. I pushed it and pushed it until we came to blows. I bloodied the lip that had kissed her. But Frankie would always have the last say, and the wounds he inflicted upon me were of an altogether different order.

'Are you mad?' he cried in the alley. 'Do you know how much this coat costs?'

'I'll buy you another one.'

'You can't afford to. Jesus, I'm sorry, Davey.'

'If you're in trouble, talk to me,' I said. 'We could negotiate a deal. You tell them what you know about this Casas for some kind of immunity.'

Frankie laughed. A distant, far-off noise. 'I'd be surprised if I know as much about Casas as they do.'

'Why?'

'Look, clients in my kind of banking are not exactly paragons of virtue. Not the kind of people you'd introduce to Father McCory.' He thought for a moment. 'Or perhaps they are.'

'What are you saying?'

'Think before you go back to that police station. I know you don't want my money, but I'm not sure a case involving Casas is going to be the solution.'

Tell a child not to look in a box and you can be certain he will look right in it at the first opportunity. Frankie, I think, knew it would work with me.

'Remember when you were teaching me to ride a bike?' I asked.

'When you broke your collar bone? I still say that wasn't my fault.'

'I'm not saying it was.'

'Then what?'

'I'm just afraid we can't always catch each other. Even when we want to.'

'But we can always try.'

'Yes,' I said. 'We can always try.'

He moved past me and I waited in the alley until I could see him no longer. I turned and slowly headed back to the NCS building and Ellen Ross and the survivor from the burning yacht.

# Chapter Seven

When I reached the front desk, I had to ask twice for Ellen before she finally came down to meet me. As she passed the counter that divided the inner sanctums of policing from the public they were paid to police, I could see she was grinning.

'Game on,' she said.

'So you'll get me in to see Casas?'

'Try stopping me.'

Now I wonder whether I should have done this, and how life, all our lives, would have turned out if I had walked away. There's a speech I've made occasionally to juries if my client is essentially decent, even though he might have made an appalling mistake. It is along the lines that with hindsight we could all have twenty-twenty vision. But life isn't like that. Not real life. It is forged in – and this is another lawyer's term – the agony of the moment. Ellen nodded to the uniform; there was no more discussion and I made my way through a succession of security doors towards Casas.

I cannot accurately say how many levels below the surface I ended up. The custody sergeant and I walked along the final corridor, pausing only at locked gates which he opened. He nodded to other uniformed officers sitting quietly at control points and they wrote something down, on the custody records, I

assumed. Normally I would have signed in, but this was being done off the books. In contrast to the ergonomically designed living spaces up above, here it seemed as if the cells were hewn out of the very bedrock upon which the city lay.

The year before, I had been into the vaults of Thames House, the headquarters of Customs & Excise, farther along the river. I had forty crates of exhibits to wade through in a VAT fraud, a boxing-related scam, and had been amused by the stone arches and dark passages of the old building along the river, where years ago smugglers were brought by boat by the Customs men. But those dungeons were a legacy of an earlier, more brutal age. These had been deliberately created to strike fear into the hearts of the National Crime Squad's suspects.

The sergeant turned and stopped. He indicated a cell behind him with his head. There were maybe a dozen more along this stretch of the corridor. An unseen man in a distant cell screamed crazy, indecipherable words.

'If he won't see you immediately, you've got to leave. Do you understand?' the sergeant said. 'You have one minute.'

'OK,' I replied.

'We're only doing this as a favour to DI Ross, you understand?'

'I understand.'

He turned around so that his back was to me, and I saw that on the white board next to the cell door someone had scrawled the inmate's name in black marker pen. It was in inverted commas: 'CASAS'.

'I need an interview room,' I said. 'I'm not having a conference in a detention cell.'

'Only one minute.'

He let me in.

There was a mattress against the end wall, and the ceiling was so low that I instinctively ducked my head, even though it was not strictly necessary. On the right-hand side was a dull steel sink and toilet bowl. The amber light was fixed flush into the ceiling

but had a metal grille preventing it being reached by prisoners intent on smashing the glass to harm the jailers or themselves. A man sat on the mattress opposite us, his face concealed by his hands.

He had a small frame, even a delicate one, with rounded shoulders. His albino hair was collar length and tumbled down either side of his head, ending just above the paper forensic suit he had been given, his clothing having been confiscated for testing.

'One minute,' the sergeant repeated.

Still the man did not look up.

I saw that there were bandages on his hands, and they reminded me of the tape around my fists before a fight, except these were no longer white. They seeped pink from inside. I took one step forward, then stopped. 'Mr . . . Casas?'

He did not reply.

'Mr Casas, my name's David Kilkenny.'

'Kilkenny?' he said.

He looked up. And I saw what they had done to his face.

His right eye was almost closed by swelling. It was purpling now, and I knew that beneath blood was pooling and would blacken. I touched my own cheek instinctively, remembering how bruises after a boxing match felt. With his alabaster skin he looked like a Renaissance sculpture upon which someone had pressed a handful of raw red clay.

His bottom lip was split. It was puffy and rouged and curled outward. There was a freshly formed scab on it. At any moment it could split again.

'Oh, Jesus Christ,' I heard myself whispering.

'They say a police officer died,' Casas said.

'Who did this to you?'

'They say a police officer died.'

I knew the form. Cop killed. They've got the perpetrator downstairs. He's being less than forthcoming in confessing his guilt. Help him remember. Casas had been helped.

His large brown eyes were fixed on me, the right one struggling to remain open with the swelling. His small, delicate mouth was pursed, making the swollen bottom lip appear even more grotesque. I saw that though his hair was almost white, his eyebrows were black.

I banged the door, hearing nothing outside. 'Cells,' I shouted. The wicket gate, the viewing portcullis, was shut from the outside. '*Cells!*' My cries bounced off the metal door and circled us.

'You want to get out?' Casas asked quietly.

'I want to get you out.'

'They won't let me out.'

He turned his face towards the wall, and now I saw his profile. A fine chin, small child like ears, a finishing-school carriage of the head, confident and assured, even though he was in pain and was shut into this dungeon in the belly of a foreign capital.

The wicket gate slid open behind me, slicing downward through the air like a guillotine. The sergeant stood behind the door. At least, I assumed it was the sergeant since I could only see the bottom half of his face, his slightly flaring nostrils, the thin mouth opening and closing over yellowing teeth.

'I want the FME,' I said.

'He's seen one doctor.'

'And he's going to see another,' I said. 'I guarantee you that.'

'They want to interview him upstairs.'

'Not while he's in this condition.'

'Raise it with the investigation team.'

'You know what? I'm going to raise it with the press.'

'That's your prerogative.'

'No, that's my client's right. I want to see DI Ross right now.'

He lowered his face, glanced past me at Casas on the bed. Then opened the cell door with a rattling of keys. 'Do you want this man as your lawyer?'

Casas's face suddenly clouded. 'I don't understand.'

'Do you want this man? To be your—'

'You mean I have a choice?'

'Yes.'

For the first time Casas stood, and I saw that he was five-eight or nine, smallish compared to me, but not short. He looked at me, smiled until the pressure on the split in his lip stopped him. 'Then I choose him,' Casas said.

'Get me DI Ross,' I said. 'And call another FME.'

The sergeant jammed the door shut once more. But this time as he left, he forgot to close the wicket gate so that I could distinctly hear the heavy fall of his steps.

Casas said, 'In my country it is not wise to complain.'

'And which country is that?'

Casas hesitated. 'There is time for all that.'

I heard the pounding of several feet, coming closer. I glanced at Casas. 'Say nothing,' I said.

He unconsciously began to retreat towards the back of the cell.

'They won't hurt you again,' I said.

The cell door was flung open. Casas shrank back on the bed. A group of officers with faces like a lynch mob confronted us, and in front of them all, virtually unrecognisable to me with the cold fury on her face, was Ellen. She had a fax in her hand.

'Get up,' she told Casas.

'Ellen,' I said. 'I want an FME.'

'What is your name?' she demanded.

I stayed between them.

'You are Sebastian Santos,' she said. 'Don't try to deny it. We've matched your prints on the DEA database.'

My client's head dropped.

But Ellen wasn't finished. 'Sebastian Cesar Santos, I'm arresting you on suspicion of murder. You do not have to say anything. But it may harm your defence if you do not

mention when questioned something which you later rely on in court. Anything you say may be given in evidence. Santos, do you understand? It may harm your defence. Do you understand?'

'Yes,' my client said quietly.

# Chapter Eight

Two muscle-heavy jailers in short-sleeve order were sent in to remove my client from the cell. As they took him past me I appealed to Ellen.

'I want a con with my client before interview.'

'Denied,' came the reply, not from Ellen but from Leybourne, who stood in the corridor.

It all happened so quickly that soon only Ellen and I were left in the cell. I tried to follow them but Ellen pulled the door to, without actually closing it.

'This won't wash,' I said.

'Why not?'

'You know. This is C6 country.'

'Bollocks, Killer. We're Annex B and you bloody know it.'

We could have gone on like that, trading sections from the Code of Practice on Detention, Treatment and Questioning, but it would have achieved nothing. I wanted my client to enjoy the full right to legal advice. Ellen claimed this was an exceptional case, an Annex B, and that was disastrous news.

'A superintendent's cleared keeping Casas incommunicado?' I asked.

'Santos, Dave. You'd better get used to calling that piece of rubbish Santos.'

Ellen opened the cell door and walked out into the corridor.

Outside, an officer in uniform with greying hair wiped the name Casas from the board.

She turned to him. 'This is Superintendent Marsh.'

'Any complaints about the DPs treatment?' Marsh asked me.

'Why is he suddenly incommunicado?'

'Because we now know who he really is,' Ellen butted in.

'I'm talking to your superior officer, DI Ross,' I told her. 'It's his decision, not yours.'

'One, two and three,' Marsh said, as if bored by the need to explain the removal of a person's basic freedoms under the law.

Ellen began the recitation with evident enjoyment, Marsh joining in where necessary.

'Interference with evidence.'

'Or harm thereto,' he added.

'Injury to other people.'

'Alerting other suspects at large.'

'Hindering the recovery of property.'

'In connection with a serious arrestable offence,' Marsh finished.

'It's bullshit and you know it,' I said. 'You want to interview Casas – Santos – without legal rep?'

'We're not interviewing him. We're just taking him to a pretty little examination room for the FME. As you requested, counsel.'

'So I can confer with him any time I wish?'

'No,' the superintendent said. He looked at Ellen. She widened her eyes and raised her brows. He left us.

'Well, maybe,' she said when we were alone.

'Elles, one thing,' I said quietly, trying a different tone.

'What, Dave?'

'What the fuck is going on?'

With other people out of the way it was the David and Ellen show again, for a while anyway. I looked at her and tried to smile while shaking my head in disbelief.

She laughed. 'Good question, counsel.'

'Look, unless the NCS has the power to rewrite the law of the land, then either my client is incommunicado or he ain't. That's the long and the short of it, isn't it?'

'I'm prepared to recommend access,' she said, pausing, then added, 'To you.'

'Why me?'

'Because despite your reputation in the force these days, I know you're not a shyster brief and you're not bent.' Her fingers brushed against my hand for a second, nothing more, and all the while her eyes scrutinised my face. 'I know you're honest, Killer, too bloody honest. You're not going to run errands on the outside for Sebastian Santos no matter how much money he throws at you. You'll do the right thing.'

In a flash, I had got it. I had sussed the whole charade, how she had taunted me, then lured me, and then reeled me in to act as Santos's brief. 'You can go to hell,' I said to her. 'If you think I'm going to sell my client down the river—'

'Ah, the river. That's something you should ask your client about.'

'Who the hell do you think I am?'

'The best cop not on the force,' she said.

'No, Elles, gloves off.'

'Gloves off? You think you can lay that macho bare-knuckle bullshit on me?' I looked at her, and for a moment I didn't reply, wondering if she knew, but I didn't have to wait long. She knew. 'Who do you think I am, Killer? I know what happened after you left the job. Those nights in smoky rooms and round the back of dodgy industrial estates. You really found your thing, Dave, didn't you? Fighting without gloves. Bare skin and bone. That's what you think you've done all your life. But, Dave, listen to me now – as a friend – this is one fight you can't win.'

Dad left the force the same time as me. He was lost outside the police. Cast out into the world, drifting rudderless through

those terrible months of his life until the internal inquiry reached its spineless conclusion. He wanted to run a bar, something he had talked about dreamily for years, in the way some people talk about retiring to the sun. Money was tight. Frankie was in debt. I was trying to study law at night school. And so I fought.

By the time I left the force I was too old to be taken on and nurtured by a decent boxing stable as a pro. Amateur bouts wouldn't pay, save for illegal side bets, but I wasn't prepared to dive, and I'd had so much confidence knocked out of me by the inquiry that I couldn't back myself to win. So I fought for the blood money. Bare-knuckle. Dirty fights. Sometimes no holds barred. My opponents were allowed to bite me and crazy stuff like that. I remember the voodoo that went round the circuit. Mad stuff like soaking your fists in a vinegar solution to toughen them. I fought and won some money. And even in the fights I lost, and I did lose, I also won. My confidence came back.

Some of my opponents had knuckles that felt as sharp as knives when their shots pounded into my face. Others were blunt and heavy as mallets. Before long, I came across a monstrous psychopath who'd served time on a blag and relished the idea of pulverising an ex-cop. He got his wish. After I lost, I was taken to hospital, where they took one look at me and called the police. I had to pretend I was mugged, though the WPC who took my statement – they were called WPCs back then – didn't believe a word of it. I didn't blame her. We both knew what the score really was. My first reaction as I lay there bandaged up like something from the Valley of the Kings was that I wanted to stop. But I promised myself that I would keep going until I won again.

'Dave,' Ellen said, 'you simply can't win this.'

'Where have I heard that before?' I replied.

* * *

We came to an administration area above the detention facilities. Leybourne stood outside one door with his assistant, Owens, next to him, and the uniformed custody sergeant stood a little farther back. They stopped whispering when we arrived.

'FME's with him now,' Leybourne said.

'The FME's here already?' I asked.

'Tending to another case,' Owens added, thereby earning himself a vicious stare from Leybourne, who appeared keen not to tell me anything.

'Which is not relevant to you,' he said.

'Oh, you mean someone else down here's slipped on a bar of soap, DCI?'

'Is this how you behave in court?' Leybourne asked.

'I behave worse in court,' I said. 'I want to go in.'

'Santos is with the doctor.'

'The police doctor.'

'It's for his own good.'

'You'll be surprised, DCI, how many times information is gleaned from my clients when all they were doing was talking to a police doctor for their own good.'

Leybourne took off his glasses, rubbed his eyes, and for a moment I saw not just a detective but the tired father of an ill daughter. 'Agree?' Leybourne asked the custody sergeant, whose job was to safeguard prisoner welfare. The sergeant nodded.

The room smelled of spirits, iodine, surgical lotions. There was a black examining table on the end of which Santos sat. To his side was the doctor. I was surprised when she turned around and smiled at me. Her face was heart-shaped and her long velvety hair was tied in a French plait.

'Hello,' she said. 'Suzanne Lee Wha.' Her smooth magnolia skin was perfect.

'David Kilkenny,' I replied. 'I'm representing—'

'Yes, Mr Santos here,' she said.

'How is he?'

'These are nasty contusions,' she said, indicating his face with

her gloved hand. 'But not permanent. I am noting them all, in case you will need it later.'

'It was convenient that you were available so quickly,' I said, probing.

'Convenient for me too,' she replied. 'I'll get two fees. But only one travel allowance, I fear.' She smiled again. She removed a pad of cotton wool from Santos's cheek. 'All done,' she said to him. 'I will insist that he is checked upon again in six hours. I hope he's comfortable until then.'

She looked at her watch, then scribbled some more notes at a table to the right of the room. It would finally constitute her Book 83 entry, her medical examination record.

'I'm sorry for what happened,' she said to Santos.

He nodded. As she opened the door, he said, '*Gracias.*'

She turned and smiled, then bowed. '*De nada*,' she said.

Spanish.

The door closed and Santos slipped off the bed and leaned against the wall. He had been given his own pad of cotton wool, which he held periodically to his cheekbone.

'Feel like talking?'

His right eye was closed now and his bottom lip had been moistened with some cream.

'When I was a boy, I often dreamed of this city,' he said.

'We need to talk about the case,' I told him.

'Shakespeare putting on his plays. Marlowe and his Dr Faustus. Donne, Milton, Chaucer, Thomas More, Dickens and Blake. I cannot imagine that any other single city in the world has spawned as much literature.'

'Do you realise the gravity of your position?'

'I wonder whether Marlowe dreamed of his Mephistopheles here and Milton realised Paradise was lost?'

'I need to ask you some questions.'

'No, you need to win my trust.' He moved two steps towards me. I could see the clear fluid seeping from his right eye, but he ignored it.

'Of course I want to win your trust. So that I can properly represent you. So that I can help you.'

'Not so that you can help the police?'

'I do not want to help the police.' I said slowly, stressing every word.

'Even when you were a police officer?' He paused. 'They told me.'

'Do you know why they told you? Because they don't want you to trust me.'

'Why?'

'Because I know how they work things.'

'So how are they . . . working this?'

'I don't know,' I said. 'Yet.'

The strain of standing had taken its toll on Santos. He sat back on the edge of the examination table. He was not looking at me when he said, 'That was, I think, an honest answer. I could always tell when my children lied, but with adults usually I'm not so good.'

'Everything could be bugged,' I said. 'So be very careful about—'

'It must have been close to here that men were drawn and quartered,' Santos said.

'They hung them first. Look, say nothing you don't wish the whole world to know. Understand?'

Santos nodded. 'Hanging too? It seems excessively cruel. Why are you no longer in the police? Did you leave or—?'

'Neither,' I said, then thought about it. 'Both.' I groped for a way to best describe it. 'One day, I just stopped being a policeman.'

It was, in truth, a death by a thousand cuts. Every day of that inquiry a cut. Every internal interview a cut, every clarifying statement, deposition, taped interview, preliminary hearing, interrogatory – cut, cut, cut. There comes a time when you are so sick of it all that you are almost prepared to tell them what they want to hear just so they will stop and the process can be

over. I came to understand that. And that is precisely why I insisted on being available to my clients at every possible stage.

'You cannot just stop being what you are,' Santos said.

'Then I was never truly a policeman,' I said.

'My wife's father was District Commissioner of Police,' he said. 'So I know that sometimes bad things happen. I always used to admire the police, though.' He paused, touched his bruising. 'But now it doesn't matter, I suppose. What happened to you?'

'There was a corruption scandal. Officers were taking kick-backs – money on the river. Drugs moved from the ports in the estuary and into the city. And they got paid.'

'And you exposed this?'

That wasn't how it happened. 'When it came out? I told the truth. No one believed me. No, they did believe me, but they pretended they didn't.'

Santos shook his head. 'Now you upset me. This is not the London of my childhood dreams. The city that "like a garment doth wear the beauty of the morning". Do you think Wordsworth was actually upon Westminster Bridge when he thought up those words?'

'I don't know. Does it matter?'

His eyes flashed. '*Why* don't you know?' he said.

'Because poetry bores me.'

'You affect to be a Philistine. It is a conceit.'

'No, I actually am a Philistine. Or would be if I knew what the hell it meant.'

Santos stood. 'Let us see what you do know then, as a lawyer. What do you advise me, as a lawyer?'

'To say nothing. For the moment. Let's hear their accusations and then we can respond.'

Santos appeared hurt. 'Can't I at least tell them the truth?'

'You were on the yacht?'

He nodded.

There was a knock on the door. I held the handle from the inside.

'Why did you use a false name?' I asked.
'All in good time,' he said. 'I wish I could see my family.'
'Where are they?'
'Impossibly far away.'

# Chapter Nine

The interview room was unlike any I had encountered before. On the wall to the right of the door were six built-in television screens. They were the newest flat-screen models, designed for minimum distortion. Below them was a black-framed two-tier trolley and on this were two VCRs, which could be moved around the room. They had jog, shuffle and frame-by-frame functions, and also a print facility.

Owens and Leybourne entered the room first. Leybourne took the remote for the video equipment. I sat with my client on the left-hand side of the desk, so that we faced the wall of screens. There was a washed-out image on one of them. It reminded me of a charcoal sketch of how London looked from the river on a foggy day. Leybourne immediately clicked the image off. They wanted to build up to this.

Ellen nodded to Leybourne and the two male officers dutifully sat opposite us at the table. Ellen Ross, though DCI Leybourne's subordinate officer in theory, let it be known that she was actually in charge, and was the only person standing.

'He would like to contact his family,' I told her.

Ellen shot a glance at Santos. 'I bet he would,' she said.

'It can be supervised,' I said, 'with time delay if you're worried about tipping off.'

'He's not speaking to his family. Tape on or off?' she asked, directing her question to me.

'This isn't an interview. We agreed on a disclosure briefing with my client present,' I replied.

'Off, then.'

'Right, before we go further, I want to know what the case against my client is.'

'We have arrested your client for murder,' Leybourne said.

'An alleged murder,' I corrected him.

'There's nothing alleged about the murder, Mr Kilkenny,' Ellen said. 'You're going to agree that.'

'My client's participation is the issue, then.'

'If you say so,' Ellen replied.

'No, you say so. You must say so.' I chided her. 'His participation must be still at issue or you would have been obliged to have charged him by now. Isn't that right . . .?' I looked quickly at Owens. 'Mr Owens. Or you would be obliged to charge him under C16.1. You are familiar with C16.1, Mr Owens?'

Suddenly under the spotlight, the overweight detective began to sweat and mumble. 'Uh, when a DP is . . . I mean, if the officer was—'

'Shut up,' Ellen whispered to him. 'He's just winding you up.' She turned to me, tried to smile, just a hint of venom there now. 'Good try, Dave.'

'Remind me how you established my client's ID.'

'Print match on DEA files.'

'Charging of detained persons,' Owens sputtered.

Both Leybourne and Ellen glared at him.

'You have a very cunning lawyer, Mr Santos,' Ellen said.

'I cannot believe that in your country such men are provided free of charge,' Santos said.

'You're going to find nothing's totally free,' Ellen replied. 'But Legal Aid will pay for Mr Kilkenny here while we trawl through your assets.'

'You'll address no questions directly to my client,' I said.

'Attack's still your best form of defence, isn't it, Dave?' she said. 'You're ex-job. You know asking about sections and paras is going to confuse a working detective, like hard-working DS Owens here. We know the law. We practise it. We just can't recite it as a limerick like you briefs can.'

'C16.1,' I said, trying to be patient. 'When an officer considers that there is—'

She cut me off. '—sufficient evidence to prosecute a detained person, and that there is sufficient evidence for a prosecution to succeed, he shall without delay cease questioning—'

She recited the provision virtually verbatim. Ellen always knew her stuff. Now I repaid her; I cut her off. 'But there is a delay, DI Ross. Here we are. So you don't have sufficient evidence to charge my client. So why don't you just tell me what you say he did.'

Ellen nodded to Leybourne, who pressed one of the buttons on the remote. The six screens behind him jumped into life with a fizz of static. As the picture resolved itself, I became aware of Santos shuffling uneasily in his seat. The video footage was in black and white. A view of a bankside I recognised, but from an elevated level.

'The London Maritime Hotel,' Ellen began, 'has a complex of CCTV cameras. One of them is aimed at the river after thieves raided the luxury riverside suites and made off by boat last year.' She nodded and Leybourne paused the footage. Ellen looked at me. 'They got away. River Police fucked it up. But then you know all about River Police fuck-ups, don't you?'

'Continue,' I said, controlling myself.

Ellen paced up to the wall of screens. 'Here is the river earlier this evening.'

In the degrees of grey on the screen, I distinguished the river by the lights reflected on it. An attractive sight, pleasing to most eyes, but I knew the darkness that lay below the surface, the pressing of deep water that seeks to flood into you at every turn.

Leybourne put the VCR into frame-by-frame, and on the screens, replicated six times, the expensive bow of a yacht eased into view from the left-hand side.

'The luxury yacht *Corinth*,' Ellen said.

Cutting silently through the water, it reminded me of a bird, one of those gulls with black streaks around their eyes, setting off their otherwise white faces.

'Hired out at great expense to the Bank of Basle & Berne by one Francis Kilkenny,' Ellen said. 'The shipping company is a Greek-registered one. They picked up a lot of these millionaire's playthings in the recession. Bought them at rock-bottom prices. Got nothing to do with them for the moment. The perfect place to wine and dine a customer. While they're alive.'

The yacht was now fully in the frame, from bow to stern. The black glass for optimum privacy, the sundeck at the rear, the elevated bridge, the sweeping lines that allowed it to knife through the tide. Powerful, unseen engines churned the water into a bubbling foam in its wake.

'Crew of three,' Ellen said. She looked at Santos, and now he did return her stare. 'Two Albanians, one Montenegrin.' She paused to let this snippet of information sink in with Santos. 'Oh, yes. We've found them. But I don't suppose your client can help us with that?'

'No questions to my client,' I reprimanded her.

'The crew jumped ship. Can you believe that? On a cold night, they jumped straight into the black water. What do you imagine made them do that?' she asked, even though she seemed perfectly well aware of the answer.

'If they've made statements, I want to see them,' I said.

'Steady on, Killer,' she retorted. 'They can hardly say "God Save the Queen" between them. They're illegals and are refusing to talk. They seem scared as hell about it all. We've tracked down a Serbo-Croat translator for the Montenegrin, but can't get an Albanian one yet.' She looked pointedly at Santos. 'But we will, Mr Santos. We will.'

'All the crew are alive? They're not the vics?' I asked.

'Watch the birdie, Dave,' she said. 'Now do you see it?'

And I did.

For a moment, I didn't know which one of the six screens to look at. My eyes flicked from bottom left to top right, then to one of the middle screens, then back to bottom left.

There was smoke coming from the cabin of the yacht.

'Fire started inside. We've borrowed forensic scientists from Arson. We'll find out why.'

The volume of smoke increased, billowing out in thick, oily coughs from the cabin, hanging in the air behind the yacht like a tail, before being absorbed into the night sky.

'Hit the mag,' Ellen said.

Leybourne adjusted his glasses, then used magnification to zoom right into the boat. We shot in with dizzying speed, until it seemed we were just above the sundeck at the back. Everything was blurred now, and the images on the six screens danced tremulously as every vibration on the yacht was magnified dozens of times over.

'Who's that?' Ellen asked.

I didn't see it at first. Thought it was a shadow. Then it seemed like the dark claws of a crab, or maybe the tentacles of a squid. But it was a hand. A man must have been prostrate just within the cabin, most of his body shielded from the CCTV lens by the cabin's black windows. His fingers crept forward slowly, as if in pain, and then reached up, tips towards the sky, and smashed into the glass that protected a flare gun.

I looked at the bandages on Santos's hand. Once pink, they were now red with the blood.

'It is me,' Santos said.

I shot my hand out to his right arm as rapidly as I could. He began to groan with the impact, but swallowed most of the pain I caused. 'Be quiet,' I said.

'It is me,' Santos repeated. 'Why should I deny it?'

'We know it's you, Santos,' Ellen said.

'I'm terminating this interview,' I told her.

'It's not an interview, so you have no right to terminate,' Ellen snapped back.

'I just want to tell the truth,' Santos said.

'Tell us,' Leybourne said from across the table.

'He doesn't want me to tell you the truth,' Santos said, indicating me.

'Conspiracy to pervert?' Ellen said to me.

'Fuck you, Ellen,' I answered.

'No, Dave, you're going to fuck your client. Jesus, we just want to know the truth.' She moved her face right alongside Santos's. 'Tell us the truth.'

'None of this is admissible in court,' I countered.

'I don't give a shit about court. Tell us the truth, Santos.'

'I didn't do it,' Santos cried out.

'You're a lying shit,' Ellen shouted in his ear.

'I didn't do it,' Santos repeated.

'Do what?'

'Kill him.'

'Kill who?'

'Shut up,' I shouted.

'Him,' Santos said. 'Him.'

Ellen reached inside her jacket. Pulled out some Polaroids, threw them on to the table. 'You mean him?' she said, pointing at the photos.

'Without scum like you, Santos, drug dealers couldn't launder their money,' Leybourne said.

Ellen grabbed Santos's head, made him look up. 'Listen to the DCI.'

'What the hell are you doing?' I said.

'She's going to hit me,' Santos cried out. 'She's going to hit me again.'

I tried to prise Ellen's hands from Santos's head. 'For God's sake, Ellen.'

'This piece of shit's saying I hit him? Is he? Are you?' She

moved her head so that she could look into his eyes. 'And I'm saying you're a murdering cop-killer. Do you hear me, Santos?'

I pushed Ellen away from him.

'He killed a cop, Dave. The bastard killed a cop.'

'This is over,' I said.

'No, Dave, this is just starting. Santos is going down for doing that.'

There was a change in her eyes, as if she were now witnessing what had happened on that yacht. I realised I hadn't seen the Polaroids. Rapidly, I turned, only to be greeted by the six screens showing the yacht bursting into flames and an emergency flare shooting up into the sky.

On the table were the images. Full colour, unlike the screens on the wall. Post mortem shots of a naked body. Burned. But not burned all over like you'd expect if this man had been trapped in the flames on the yacht. The areas of burned flesh covered discrete areas of the body. They had been selected. Deliberated upon.

Chosen.

The feet, or rather the undersides of the soles, were incinerated black. The stomach had been burned out. The flesh around the throat was charred crisp, like a tight brown noose on a white-skinned man. The victim's feet were tied together at the ankles, and his dead, locked eyes looked up to his arms, which were bound together above his head as if in prayer.

'Jack Telfer,' Ellen said, her voice now stripped of emotion. 'Yes, Dave. DCI Jack Telfer. We think a blowtorch was used on his skin.'

And though I didn't recognise the agonised face, the name was one that I knew.

# Chapter Ten

Santos sat on the mattress at the end of the cell and lowered his head into his hands. He was about to say something, but I held up my hand.

I said, 'This is a conference between David Kilkenny and Sebastian Santos, between lawyer and client. It is without prejudice, and covered by lawyer–client privilege. Anything said here is confidential – and inadmissible in court.'

I added the last subclause more in hope than anything else. If we were being taped, as I strongly suspected, it would be up to the trial judge to rule whether anything Santos said to me was in fact privileged. If the court decided that it was an attempt by Santos to use me to approach witnesses, to 'nobble' them, to alter or destroy evidence, to tip off other offenders, then it would go in. If I participated knowingly, I would be a criminal accomplice. If I did it negligently, I might suffer professional sanctions.

'I am going to assume that this conversation and indeed every word that I have uttered to or with my client has been covertly recorded by the police. I want to record that Mr Santos has extensive facial and bodily injuries. Indeed, he effectively accused an investigating officer of inflicting violence upon him, which accusation was not denied.'

If anything incriminating was going to come out, even inadvertently, then I had got in an early strike. I quickly

calculated that if a jury were one day to hear these tapes, then we might garner a shred of sympathy if they knew Santos had been beaten in custody.

'Do you understand?' I said to him. 'We will be taped.'

He nodded.

I could have gone right up to him, sat on the bed next to him, had a conference of whispers as I had earlier, so close that I could feel his breath on me at the same time as his words. But the copies of the Polaroids Ellen had given me burned in my hands. I silently recited the credo of the defence hack: presumed innocent, presumed innocent. I thought of the body, and the smell of cooked food from the cell kitchens – fried bacon, fried bread – turned my stomach.

'Do you want me to say that I did this thing?' he said. He tried to open his jaw, seeing how far it would stretch before the pain kicked in.

The case had got to me. The night, which had started in my father's bar and seen the return of my prodigal brother, had got to me. I was about to violate one of my deepest convictions, to break the taboo, to do something I had never done to a client before a case – ask whether they did it. I needed to know.

But Santos got there first. 'If I tell them I did it, will they leave me alone?'

'For the moment. It's the tough-and-tender approach. They are going to make your life hell as long as you protest your innocence. And they will let you know that the moment you confess then you will be left alone. That's all they want. The truth. Their truth. That you are guilty.'

'Even if I am not?'

'A cop is dead. You were on the boat. He was on the boat. The three crew members jumped ship. Unless they did it, how did this happen? There are no other alternatives.'

'Aren't there?' Santos said quietly.

'Tell me what they are.'

'So if I confess, I will be left alone?'

'They will treat you like a king until trial, so no one will doubt the voluntary nature of your confession.'

Santos shook his head. 'What kind of system is this?'

'A human one,' I replied.

'Human?' he said, shaking his head. 'It is human to deprive a man of his family?'

'I'll keep trying to arrange contact.'

'You are very close to your brother?' he asked. 'He says you are close.'

'We are.'

'I wonder . . .' he said, his voice trailing off.

'What?'

'Whether anyone has ever invented an engine of torture that has caused more pain and suffering than the family. It is the source of our greatest consolations too,' he said. 'That is why it hurts.' He turned to the far wall. 'That woman. I don't like her. I get the impression she's not very fond of me either.'

'She's just doing her job,' I said, surprising myself by feeling protective towards Ellen.

Santos half turned so I could see the damage to his face. '*This* is her job?'

I held up the photos in return. 'No, this is her job.' He turned back to the wall. I continued, 'If she assaulted you, you can pursue it.'

'It is nothing,' Santos said. 'Nothing compared to my country.'

'Which is?'

Santos paused, studied me. 'New Granada,' he said.

'Where?'

'An old name for a new world. South America.'

Why are you over here?'

'For business.'

'What kind of business?'

'My wife always asked, "How long are you going to be away for this time? What kind of business is this that deprives a man of his children?" '

'What business?'

Santos walked up to me, and when he was within touching distance and the kaleidoscope of bruising on his face was plain before my eyes, he whispered, 'Do you ask this as my lawyer or as your brother's brother?'

'Both,' I said.

The answer amused him. 'I am an entrepreneur. I am a man of money. I make money for those who would make money with me.'

'So why were you on the yacht, and don't tell me it was to see the sights of London.'

'Just business.'

'With a police officer?'

'I didn't know that man was a police officer.'

'Look,' I said, 'I've heard of Jack Telfer. He was assigned to witness protection the last time I heard.'

'I know none of this.'

'He must have been undercover on something else.'

'It was he who approached me.'

'Through who?'

Santos hesitated. 'Contacts,' he replied.

I wondered then if this meant Frankie, but I didn't want Santos to say so in the station, not until I could speak to Frankie again.

'So why the meet?' I asked.

Santos shook his head, a faint smile on his lips. 'My wife used to iron my underwear. Neatly fold my vests. Check I had enough shorts. You miss these little things, don't you? I open my case now and . . . I see I bore you with my domestic details. You are not married?'

'Why?'

'It's nothing. I was just thinking about how I met my wife. Just now, the police were playing that video to us and all I could think was how I met Constanza. But I realise you do not have time for such things,' he added, looking hopeful, his face lit up with the memory.

'Some other time, perhaps,' I said. 'We have a lot to cover.'

He nodded. 'Never enough time in the affairs of men to speak about love.'

'It's not that. We have some problems to deal with.'

'And I admit, they worry me. But this fear is nothing compared to how I felt when I first saw her.' He went on, 'Do you think there are just a few moments in our lives that define everything? When I saw her walking along that beach, almost as if she was emerging from the sea, I knew I had reached one of them. But how could I get close? She had these two huge mountain dogs with her, the kind rich people like her use to protect them from people like me, and they were snapping with their steel jaws at every boy who went near her. So I thought quickly and had a plan. I went and made my purchase. When I returned I absolutely ignored the girl. Instead, I started tossing the dogs these little salted biscuits I'd bought. It was Lent and they're only made at that time of the year, these *corazones de los angelinos*, angels' hearts. I made the dogs sit and beg and whine for these biscuits, then when I got closer I got them to jump in the air and tumble over in the sand like slobbering puppies. The girl was laughing so much she could hardly stand up, and it was she who introduced herself to me. I asked if one day I could take these wonderful dogs along the beach for a walk, not even asking about her, and that was how I got my first date with the woman who some years later became my wife.'

'Her name was Constanza, you say?' I asked.

'My Constanza.'

I was glad he had spent this time remembering something good in his life, because I had seen a hundred times that an accused man, guilty or innocent, needs deep reserves of strength to face the ordeal of a criminal investigation.

'I was asking why there was a meeting on the boat,' I said.

'This man Telfer wanted to propose a scheme, to make us all rich.'

If Telfer was undercover, he was unlikely to be working for

witness protection any more. Was he bent? Trying to make money on the side? Or was it a sting on Santos? I couldn't answer these question without knowing more about Santos himself.

'I don't want to know what the scheme was,' I told him.

'We never got that far.'

'Why not?'

'Because,' Sebastian Santos told me slowly, 'of the *other* man.'

I suddenly felt off balance, as if the floor had cracked beneath me. Frankie's face flashed before me. 'What other man?'

'The other man,' Santos repeated. 'The other man, the other man. Jack Telfer was not alone. There was another man. He was the one who started it. He attacked me. The other man.'

'One of the crew?'

'Where – is – the – other – man?'

'Calm down.'

'He attacked me. I was unconscious. I woke and the yacht was on fire.'

'You were attacked?'

'By the other man. Ask them.' He screamed through the open wicket gate. '*Where is the other man?*'

There were footsteps rushing down the corridor at Santos's screaming. The custody sergeant flung open the door, forcing Santos to stagger back and collide with the side wall. He slid down the wall and half squatted, half sat in the angle of the wall and the floor.

'What the hell is going on?' the sergeant asked.

More footsteps from outside. Ellen was the first of the detectives to arrive. The impact with the wall had caused the wound on Santos's cheek to open again. Blood trickled in slow tears from his high cheekbone down to the corner of his mouth.

'I'll get the FME,' the sergeant said.

'I swear on the eternal souls of my children that there was another man,' Santos whispered.

'What did he say?' Ellen asked.

I went into the corridor with Ellen while the sergeant hurried

to his desk. A uniformed PC was already on the phone with the sergeant's instructions.

'Did Jack Telfer have a partner?' I asked.

Her cheeks were flushed with blood from the excitement of the situation. 'You know Telfer, a one-man band,' she said. 'Just like you.'

'I don't know anything about the force any more,' I replied. 'I didn't know you were into beating up DPs.'

She saw that I still had the Polaroids in my hand. She said, 'What would you have done, Dave?'

'You did him?' I asked.

'I never said I did.'

'You never denied it.'

'I don't answer to scrotes like Santos.'

Another silence.

I broke it by asking, 'Why's Santos on the books?', referring to his prints being on intelligence files.

She gave me the standard 'No comment on matters of sensitive material and on going investigations'.

'We're not going to interview him today.'

'You're not working me, Elles? I want "no interviews" endorsed. On the custody rec.'

'It's already there,' she said.

We reached the desk and I insisted that I see the entry on the custody record that said 'DP unfit for IV'. It was official.

Leybourne approached Ellen. 'I've . . . I've really got to go to the hospital,' he said.

'I can handle it,' she said, and he smiled at her before he left.

Ellen said nothing else to me until we were out in the night, waiting for the FME to see Santos again. After the artificial warmth of the NCS building, the air blowing off the river felt charged with thousands of particles of ice, and made the skin on my face feel tight and dry. She took out a crumpled packet of Camels and offered me one. I declined. Ellen lit her cigarette with a novelty lighter, a laughing

policeman in 1930s country bobby uniform whose head pivoted open to spit out the flame.

'Very tasteful,' I said.

She smiled. 'Pete got it for my last birthday. He probably nicked it.' She puffed a couple of times. 'Thought that counts.'

She was silent for a while and I gave her time, since I knew that one of the recurring problems in Ellen's life was her younger brother Pete. Theirs was a complex and volatile relationship. I wasn't surprised when she changed the subject.

'Didn't get the chance to tell you, but I was proud of you,' she said. 'Getting that unlawful killing verdict.'

'Oh, the inquest.'

'Don't "Oh, the inquest" me, Dave. It was an amazing result. Of course, made the Met hate you even more.'

The previous year I'd spent three months in a coroner's court trying to uncover the truth about how a young woman died in a police cell. It was painstaking work, with all the witnesses either police officers who wouldn't break rank or other prisoners – heroin addicts, prostitutes, pickpockets – who the jury were unlikely to trust. Finally, one of the younger officers cracked. The inquest jury declared that Katherine Calderwood had been asphyxiated by the use of unlawful 'C&R', Control & Restraint.

'Is it true there's no Legal Aid at inquests?' Ellen asked.

'Yes.'

'So you represented Katherine's family for free? How could you afford to do that?'

'I think my bank manager will tell you I couldn't.'

She took a long drag so that the end of the cigarette glowed. 'You never took me on that trip, Killer.'

'Like you really care,' I replied.

'The ultimate shag you kept telling me, gliding through the city at night.'

'We didn't do so badly. Didn't hear you complaining.'

She looked out over the undulating sheet of water before us.

'Scares the shit out of me,' she said. 'I mean, what the hell is down there anyway?'

'The rubbish of the city. A few fish.'

'How many bodies did you haul out of it?'

'Enough,' I said.

Enough meant too many, and too many was any at all. I remembered all their faces. Some as 'fresh' as they had gone in, some little more than skeletons. The leached face of a little girl came back to me. She was washed down from Chiswick Mall all the way to Greenwich. That freaked me. What a ride – a young body, swept by the power of this river, our river, for miles, around bends, past millions of people, and no one had seen her, or no one had cared. I spotted her, face down, her arms extended beside her, the fingers fanned out as if they were wings and she were trying to beat her way out of the tide. I rolled her over and I cried. When I told her mother that her child had been found, she shed no tears.

'Someone said you river boys get one a month,' Ellen said.

I shook my head. 'Think I would've settled for that. It was one a week.'

'Never an easy day in David world,' she said.

'It's not so bad. I saw dolphins once, up near Chelsea Harbour. And there's a colony of wild green parrots, near Barnes Bridge.'

'Parrots? In London?'

'Yeah,' I said. 'Ruth took me to see them.'

She paused at the mention of Ruth's name, then finally said, 'You and me, Dave, hate all this stuff and love it too, don't we? Christ, what else are we fit for?'

'Speak for yourself.'

'Oh yeah? What else would you do, then?'

'Easy. Retire to the rainforests, pick some mangoes.'

'Yeah, well, I might join you on that bloody trip,' she said.

'Ever thought about going back to Suffolk?'

'Nice safe John Constable country? Be an admission of

failure, wouldn't it? Went back last year for a few days when Pete got into trouble again. I had to try to square it with the local CID.'

'Shoplifting?' I asked.

'Oh, no, dysfunctional kleptomania. Bloody shrinks and social workers. Can't tell the truth. Abducted for seven days and seven nights by a sex offender who left him in a lay-by with a toy aeroplane. And it fucked his life. That's the truth. I remember coming down in my nightie on the third night and there were these cops downstairs playing cards and drinking beer.'

'Never caught him, did they?'

'I'm sitting next to you, aren't I? If they'd found that bastard, I'd have killed him. Somehow.'

She flicked the ash off the end of her cigarette.

'Think Santos was lying?' I asked.

'About another man?'

'Someone with Telfer.'

'Or someone with Santos.'

I paused and examined her face. We were both tired. I remembered Telfer's nickname and tried to speak to Ellen as if I was still on the force. 'Jack the Lad going out like that. That's a tough result.'

Telfer was what middle-aged men call a ladies' man, what women call a pest. Always trying to prove himself, especially with the younger women. He was attractive, charming in a smooth sort of way. He was insatiable.

'He was a good cop,' she said.

'Knew him well?'

'I knew him.'

She turned away slightly. I tried to picture it: Telfer and Ellen. It worked. 'This is not personal, is it, Elles?'

She looked at me, tried to steel her face against any giveaway emotions. 'More personal than you could possibly imagine,' she said.

High above, a cloud slowly came apart to reveal the moon, pale and cratered like the specimen skulls I'd seen in forensic labs.

'So what's the file on Santos say?' I asked.

'Enough for me to know that you and Santos are a marriage made in heaven.'

'Or hell.' I laughed.

'You said it. Actually, Dave, he kind of reminds me of you.'

'Thanks a bloody bundle.'

'No, working for one criminal organisation after another. Milking them all for money. Santos is as bad as a bloody lawyer. Or they're as bad as him. He's a money man. Relieved succeeding cartels of tens of millions and then moved on to the next gang in the playground.'

'Convictions?'

'None for violence. But a trail of bodies of those who stood in his way. Nothing ever proved. Brains not brawn. Bet he can't even handle a gun.'

'How about a blowtorch?'

'That's what I've got to prove, isn't it?'

We looked at the tide, purplish like real blood, and for a moment I imagined the burning yacht on the water, delivering us its human cargo.

'I would like to see your dolphins,' Ellen said. 'Just once. Ruth didn't show you those?'

'No,' I replied. 'That was me.'

# Chapter Eleven

My cab finally turned left into Cable Street, which ran north–south approximately and was crammed on either side with restaurants and cafés. Some were still open, with tired waiters standing in groups in nearly deserted dining-rooms, praying for the last diners to go. It was also known as Restaurant Row. A place to try authentic but not fancy cuisine, between the City and the West End.

The Cable Street area mapped a kind of shifting record of the recent history of this city. Wave after wave of immigrants had settled here, left their mark, made money, and moved on, leaving the odd eatery behind. There was the fourth-best Jewish deli, with the best chopped liver and slaw in London. Then the Indian restaurants, the older Bengali ones, now more expensive, the more recent Bangladeshi ones still rock bottom. A West Indian takeout, with patties and goat curry – Train secretly binged on the goat, but I never seemed to catch him. The seventies, Vietnamese, Cambodian, an Afghani café from the eighties. A Kurdish place, a café cum pool hall, really a community social club. Now a Bosnian restaurant had opened. I hadn't tried it yet. All these peoples and foods. And at the end of the row, right on the river, the Irish. Dad's bar. The Pride of Kilkenny.

There was a pier near by where they loaded and unloaded tourists for pleasure cruises. The pier master was a mate of

Dad's, ex-River Division, and I guess that, like generations of Londoners before us, we all profited from the river. Dad used to announce proudly, as if it were his very own brilliant idea, that the city wouldn't have even existed if it hadn't been for the river. The Romans chose this spot two thousand years ago precisely because the river was just narrow enough to bridge, while the tides were high enough to accommodate maritime ships of the imperial fleet. Owing to Dad's passion, these small details, like the fact that London Bridge is today only thirty yards from where the original Roman bridge was built, seemed a part of our family history. A good part – probably because they didn't actually involve any of us.

The cab pulled up outside, and I saw that although the front door had the closed sign up, there were dim lights inside. I doubted Dad would be having a lock-in, not after everything that had happened earlier. I hoped he was with Frankie.

Behind the frosted glass of the door I saw a distorted shape moving rapidly. I could hear the footsteps padding across the wooden floor above the noise of the river colliding with the embankment wall.

Dad opened the door with a welcoming smile on his face, his chin now dusted with silvery stubble. Then his smile withered. It died on his face as quickly as a car engine cutting out. He realised that I was alone. 'Where's Frankie?' he asked.

'He said he'd be here.'

'What do you mean here? You went with him to the station. Now where is he?'

'I got him out,' I said.

'When did you get him out?'

'An hour or two ago,' I said.

'What're you blathering about now?'

'I took another case.'

'You walk in with your brother and you walk out with another case. That's a bloody lawyer for you, isn't it?'

'I'm not going to fight tonight,' I told him. I went behind the

bar where the phone was screwed into the wall, picked up the receiver and dialled my flat.

'Train, it's me.'

'Davey, where are you?'

'Dad's. Frankie there?'

'Is he meant to be?'

'Shit,' I said. 'Look, if he comes in, call Dad.'

'It's done,' he said.

'What're you up to?'

'Watching *Singing in the Rain*.'

'Sounds like a top party,' I said. 'See you.'

'Where could he be, son?' Dad asked.

I took his arm as I came out from behind the bar. 'I'll find him, Dad. I will.'

'He's only just come home.'

'We'll get him back, you'll see.'

'How?'

My mind spun with pictures, bleak, depressing, wild, fantastical, like the whispered stories Frankie used to tell after lights out. He told tales about headless corpses, and maggots, and poltergeists, and then fell asleep sweetly in a flash, while I'd be up on my own for hours, calling out: 'Frankie, are you awake, Frankie?' He never answered. Either he was too heavily asleep, or he wanted me to sweat.

Then I hit on an idea. I went behind the bar again and dialled 192; I got the Dorchester's number from Directory Enquiries.

'Can I have the room of Francis Kilkenny?' I asked the receptionist, when I got through.

There was a pause.

'How is that spelt?' she asked.

I spelled out our surname, adding, 'It could be under Frankie Kilkenny.'

'There's no one by that name in residence, sir.'

My mind raced, trying to make sense of what Frankie had told me. 'He might've just checked out,' I told the receptionist.

'I'm sorry, sir. There's no record of anyone by that name this month.'

'Thank you,' I whispered.

'Oh, Jesus,' Dad said.

He went about switching off the rest of the lights very slowly, as if with every extinguished bulb his hopes were fading. I thought through the last encounter with my brother. And I came to this conclusion: if he was going on the run, then why on earth did he ask for my keys?

I went back to the phone and redialled 192.

'The London Maritime Hotel,' I said.

The river hotel. The CCTV video. I hoped I was wrong. But Frankie had to be staying somewhere. I was given the number and dialled so hastily that I got the number garbled. I took a deep breath and tried to calm myself.

The phone rang at the other end and was answered. 'Room of Francis Kilkenny,' I asked.

'One moment, sir, I think he's checking out. Shall I try?'

I hung up.

Dad had come round the bar, and gazed at me.

'Got him,' I said.

He hugged me, though he said nothing.

I remembered another time when he had not only hugged me but had also begged my forgiveness. It was after he had belted me. I'd played truant and he'd gone in to see the fathers. In front of me, and below the huge cast-iron crucifix on the wall of the school office, they'd solemnly told Dad that I was playing truant because I had something of the demon in me and that it would be a mistake to spare the rod.

Dad spared nothing.

After he finished belting me at home, he was in tears, and said that he loved me. That was his love, belting the hell out of a small boy's demons. But they never really understood why I bunked off. They couldn't have understood what it was like constantly to be asked: Why can't you be like Francis? Why can't

you behave like you older brother? Francis is such a good child. What is wrong with you? The more they said it, the worse I behaved. I didn't want to grass Frankie up, but it went round and round in my head that I didn't need to be more like Francis, because Frankie was just like me, only they couldn't see it, no one but me could see it, because in my view he'd conned the world with his altar-boy act. Why was it only me who could see that when he served Mass and knelt next to the altar he would be sucking the most monstrous gobstopper and winking at me even while the priest raised the chalice and the congregation prayed.

The night Dad took the belt to me, Ruth stayed up with me for hours while I cried and swore that I hated my father. I found out later from Frankie that she spoke to Dad the next day. She told him if he ever beat me like that again she would run away with me and no one would ever find us. So whether shamed by a young girl or fearful of losing her, my beatings were never as bad again.

As I headed out of the bar door, I asked, 'Gone to bed, has she?'

'Tired,' Dad said. 'Up for deliveries this morning.'

'It's your turn this week.' I told him. 'You do it tomorrow. I'll help if you like.'

'She won't let me do it,' he said.

'I'll speak to her. She can't keep going like this.'

'Hasn't let me since she got back from Greece.' He said it as if his words constituted a damning confession.

Dad and I had both badgered Ruth about taking a proper holiday from the bar, with no success, until a few weeks previously. Then suddenly she decided to go to Greece with a girlfriend she hadn't seen for years.

'I'll do it tomorrow.' he said. 'I can manage all on my own.'

'You can. Your heart can't, Dad. Give us a ring, OK?'

He nodded, but I knew that deep down he was annoyed that I had mentioned his heart.

* * *

'I've come for my brother,' I said to the receptionist. When a hint of doubt clouded her face as she checked out my jeans and jacket, I added, 'Francis Kilkenny. He's checking out.'

She checked on the computer VDU, and I guessed that I hadn't spoken to her earlier. She found Frankie's listing.

'Can I call up for you?'

'I'd like to do it, it's a surprise,' I whispered, all wide-eyed. I put my index finger to my lips and she handed me the receiver after she had dialled his room for me.

It rang. The steady long tones of an internal phone.

'Yup?' Frankie said.

'It's me.'

'How'd you—?'

'I *was* on the force, Frankie.'

'Where are you?'

'Downstairs,' I told him.

I could hear a muffled sound as he put his hand over the mouthpiece. There were the indecipherable sounds of his concealed words. And I knew. There was someone else in the room.

On Frankie's floor there was a large window in one of the recesses of the corridor, with a reproduction antique table and a huge vase of fresh flowers. I knocked on his door and I saw that the window gave a perfect view of the river. If Frankie had been in his room earlier, he could have seen the yacht burn.

He opened the door and handed me a leather saddlebag from his designer luggage set, draped with first-class tags from around the world. 'Take that,' he said.

I was more interested in the person I could glimpse over his shoulder. It was a woman. She had a long coat pulled tightly around her, even though the room was too hot. There was a familiar light jasmine perfume in the air, and I knew before she turned round who it was.

'David,' Ruth said quietly, even as my heart twisted in confusion.

# Chapter Twelve

All around the cool pastel room was the detritus of Frankie's itinerant life. A Discman with Space Age headphones, two tiny portable speakers to give it just the hint of a proper system. Aluminium laptop, satellite cellular, electronic Palmpilot. Making an anonymous hotel room a little more like home. Only where was Frankie's home now? His London flat was rented out permanently. He was always on the go. His off-Fifth Avenue apartment in Manhattan belonged to the bank. Clothes everywhere, off-the-rack designer stuff with labels and price tags still hanging out of sleeves and trouser-legs, tossed in heaps on the floor like rags in a clothes bank. A Beverly Hills clothes bank, perhaps.

'Why're you here?' I asked him.

Ruth came forward from the window. 'It's my fault,' she said softly. 'I told Francis to wait for me.'

'You?' I asked.

Ruth took a short breath before she began, but it was enough for me to take her in again, a face and a figure I'd watched develop with wonder as we all grew up together in Cable Street, making me feel guilty and excited by turns.

Her father had been assistant to the regional superintendent over there in India – something like that. A British mother. This combination of parents provided Ruth with the constantly

healthy glow to her skin – smoky was the best way I could describe it – so that you knew she was not wholly British, but what she was exactly you could not state with confidence. Her skin was blemishless, save for the smallest of moles, between her top lip and her cheek, where other people might have dimples. I could never remember if it was on the same side as Cindy Crawford's beauty spot or not. Well, Ruth had it before the beauty spot made Cindy Crawford famous. Ruth's mass of wavy hair I'd always assumed was the legacy of her mother, but then I'd never seen her mother, who had died of diphtheria in India the year before Ruth and her father came to the UK.

Frankie stared hard at my face and asked, 'What's wrong?'

'They got a videotape. The police. From the hotel.'

Frankie nodded to me and we all said nothing as we began to pack. The three of us moving around that room in silence, filling Frankie's luggage with his clothes and belongings. It didn't matter where anything went, so long as it went, and soon we were ready to leave. I noticed that Frankie had a hard aluminium attaché case which he insisted on carrying himself.

Ruth and I waited in the car while Frankie paid the bill, Ruth in the back with the bulging cases we couldn't stuff into the boot. I turned – she was lit by one hundred bedroom lights from above. Her hair shone as it fell loosely around her shoulders.

'You're always going to run back to him? Is that how it's going to be?' I asked.

'When he needs me, yes.'

'Then we don't stand a chance.'

'Don't you see? Being there for him isn't the same as being with him. You want me, and you know how I feel about you, but he needs me. He's always needed me. He's not as strong as you.'

'Then why the split? Really?'

She did not answer right away, and I recalled those occasions in the previous six months when I had asked the same question;

answers varied from the time not being right for a firmer commitment to the inevitability of growing apart. But now she paused – I felt I was going to get something closer to the truth.

'He didn't want to have children,' she said.

'When?'

'Ever.'

'I don't understand. Frankie's never been anti-kids.'

'It's not the children that're the problem. It's what we bring them into. He covers it all with smiles and stories but I think he's deeply depressed.'

I remembered what he had told me outside the NCS. 'He says it's not over between you.'

'It will take a little time to untangle.'

'And where am I in the meantime? I would never have even tried to get close to you if you hadn't told me it was over.'

She leaned forward between the seats so that our faces were only inches apart. 'It is over. I'm not in love with your brother. What more is there to say?' There was the clinking of glass and she produced two small whisky bottles. 'Nicked them from the mini-bar.'

We broke the seals on the screw caps and toasted one another before we drank.

'Is he in serious trouble?' she asked.

'Could be. He's selling something. Not just financial products. I don't know. But going back into the station made me wonder what right I've got to criticise him. I'm doing the same. Giving that prisoner my song-and-dance. That's what I'm doing, isn't it? Selling justice.'

'I remember a time when you didn't believe that.'

'I've seen it too often. Let justice be done? Justice is done, every day. Well and truly done. By people like me. And things don't work out. And the good guy rarely wins, and the bad guys get away with everything and the only lesson they learn is: Why don't I do this again because no one can stop me.'

By the time I finished, I was breathing hard, steaming the windscreen. Maybe the alcohol had released it all.

'That's what you think, is it?' she asked.

'Yes.'

'Now who's selling?'

'Lawyers don't make a difference.'

'You made a difference to Katherine Calderwood's family, proved how she was killed.'

'The exception that proves the rule. Crime, injustice. It's like cancer. There's no cure. So you tell me what's left.'

She took a final sip and carefully screwed the cap back on. 'Let me see. A number of things. But chief among them, love. And because there's love, there's a little hope. But it doesn't take much.'

'Really?'

'Remember that time your father beat you? We were up all night and you were crying and do you remember what you said? You said you wanted to kill yourself because your mother died when you were born and your father hated you for it and you hated yourself. And that's when I told you. That I would never leave you. Of all the things I could think of, that was the most precious. So to answer your question, that's what I think's left after all the crime and injustice. And if you want to know, counsel, that's my sell.'

'Did you really tell Dad we'd run away together?'

'What do you think?'

'Where would we have gone?'

'To the rainforests. To—'

'— pick some mangoes. That's my line.'

'No. It was originally mine.'

When the three of us got to my place, we unloaded all Frankie's stuff just beyond the street door. He didn't want to leave his aluminium attaché, but finally handed it over when I opened the floor safe I'd built in for sensitive PII documents in security cases. Public Interest Immunity evidence.

Opening up the safe, I took out a loosely wrapped cloth parcel. In it was the best insurance I had had in my bare-knuckle days. A nine-millimetre automatic.

Hades was on the way up in the funk, techno, sonic evangelist scene. I checked on the flickering neon lights above the entrance and my suspicions were confirmed. It was a pretty sure bet since this particular MC had made Hades his home. The sign read: 'Ratman & da Rhythm science'. If we could get in, we'd be in business.

Many moons ago now, Hades was a cinema, or to be precise our favourite fleapit, where Frankie and I had gone to see films like *Diamonds Are Forever*, *The Valley of Gwangi* and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*.

He was Paul Newman, clever, full of sweet-talking and blarney. I was Robert Redford's Sundance, mean, moody and violent. We saw the film for the gunplay and, of course, made exaggerated kissing noises during the boring lovey-dovey bits. I got the film out recently on vid. It was the first time I'd watched it all the way through in twenty-plus years. It's not a cowboy pic, as we'd imagined. It's a love story. Two men loving the same woman. I couldn't believe it. When Butch and Sundance were killed together at the end and there was that freeze-frame and the whole screen turned to sepia, I can still remember, though it was two decades ago, glancing over and seeing Frankie cry.

Inside the club, the stage was hard to the right. Speakers like double wardrobes on either side. What seemed like a thousand bodies jolting in an equal number of directions. Darkness and light across the floor, not so much strobes as designer spots, and in these cones of light, just out of the reach of the manic dancers, were the bodies.

Virtual bodies, holograms, projected images of the dead. I read that the 'concept' was stolen from medieval visions of the Apocalypse. Torsos without arms, eyeless skulls, the forlorn, the

condemned, hell just above our heads – that was the conceit. I thought of the Polaroids in my pocket, and of the final few moments of agony that Jack Telfer had suffered before leaving this world, how he must have smelled his own flesh burning, and I was repelled by the revelry around me.

Frankie had by now taken off his jacket, which he'd flung on the floor in a corner, as if he simply didn't care whether he'd see it again. He pulled his shirt-tails out of his trousers, ripped off his tie, undid a couple of buttons of his shirt, and with his hollow, sunken cheeks, goatee and pencil-thin frame, he became virtually indistinguishable from the rest of the crowd. The music pounded right through us, causing Frankie to move unconsciously with the insistent beat.

'Why here?' he shouted right in my ear.

'Can't bug us here.'

He nodded his head, but it could have been to the bass line.

Ruth stood next to us and made a sign with her hand, asking whether we wanted a drink. I shook my head. The room was a dizzying whirl and my eyes found it impossible to adjust, but I had work to do. I had to find the Ratman.

He didn't see my approach; if he had I'm sure he would have tried to escape. Instead he was shouting away in the din to a sweat-steaming young girl, addressing most of his attention to her exposed and pierced belly-button. I didn't hear what they were discussing before I clamped my right hand on his puny shoulder.

His head spun around aggressively, all pointed features, nose and chin, his buck teeth and deeply pitted skin and yellow eyes giving him a reptilian look. His handle could as easily have been Lizardman.

'Jeremy,' I shouted at him.

He struggled to get out of my grip. 'Nah,' he said. He was one of those white guys who fervently wish they could be black when the sun went down. At least, that's how he tried to talk.

The Ratman, aka Jeremy Godwin. Client to David Kilkenny. Made so much money out of the gigs and 'extras' that he was refused Legal Aid the last time I represented him in court. The extras were a slice of the money being laundered through the club on his performing nights. An easy scam. If the gate is 500 punters, account it as 750. The extra 250 clubbers are fictional, but their money ends up in the coffers. Drugs cash now put into a legitimate bank account. Now laundered. Now clean. This was the very bottom of the scale of laundering. But multiply the scam by, say, 300 nights of the year. Multiply that by 300 clubs up and down the country, and even deducting tax, which is of course scrupulously paid on laundered cash, you run into millions.

The music mellowed into a moodier passage. The images of the dead loomed above.

'Ya, man,' he pleaded with me. 'I'll pay, I'll pay, soon time.'

'Of course you'll pay me. Because you promised to pay me and you are a man of honour,' I said.

'Soon time.'

'No. Here.'

'Here? I ain't got that kinda green here.'

He owed me £1,950 for taking his latest possession-with-intent-to-supply charge up to Crown, only for no evidence to be miraculously offered against him by the prosecution. Horror of horrors, the Ratman turned out to be a police informer – and that was why I'd decided to track him down. He promised to pay me privately when his aid application was refused, the court having found out that he had a blue-chip share portfolio and a BUPA scheme.

'You're going to work for me instead,' I told him.

'For you?'

'Do what you do best.'

'Turntable?'

'Grass.'

When I mentioned that G word, he panicked. It was the kind of word that could land him up in a rubbish-strewn alley with no

tongue. But I had made sure no one was sufficiently close to us to hear.

'What's a lawyer want that for?'

'I want you to check out some names.'

The drum-heavy sounds kicked back in and the room swayed.

I moved up to his ear. 'Santos,' I shouted. He nodded his head. 'And Casas.'

I didn't need to repeat myself, he'd got it first time. There are two types of grass, the sharp ones and the brain-dead. Brain-dead ones get rapid promotion to body-dead. Jeremy Ratman Godwin was smarter than that.

'What's his poison?' he asked me.

I looked into the yellow eyes. 'Money,' I said.

His eyelids closed slowly over the pupils. He nodded again. His kind of poison. He was about to go when I yanked him back by his arm.

'Soon time,' I told him.

'You working a case?'

'Something that happened tonight on the river.'

Despite the bantering between us, the encounter had been essentially good-natured. But now he froze. His lips twitched nervously over his distended upper teeth.

'That thing on TV?' he asked.

'TV?'

'Watching it backstage. News 24. Switched to CNN.'

'What did they show?' I asked, wondering how much of the story had leaked out, how much the police wanted to leak out. I should have thought of it before. You can't keep a burning yacht through the centre of the city quiet.

'Not what they showed,' Ratman said. 'What they said.' He paused, wanting me to have to ask.

'What?'

'Calling it the Boat of Horrors,' he said.

The Boat of Horrors.

'Your man involved in that shit?' Ratman asked.

'Just dig around for me,' I said.

'If you nab some pictures, we'd earn real money.'

Another reality of life on the fringes. The black market in gruesome crime-scene photos, for men in the shadows who get their kicks looking at death. I looked at the medieval holograms in the air. This vice was hardly new.

'Just do what I ask,' I said.

He left saying, 'Oh, shit, the Boat of Horrors. The Boat of—'

When he disappeared around the back of the sound stage, I went in search of Ruth and Frankie. I found the two of them right in the centre of the dance-floor, with Frankie holding court, stomping in a spaced-out fashion, with some new moves he'd probably picked up in New York. His eyes were out. The music had taken him somewhere else entirely. A small group in the swelling crowd watched and admired and even tried to copy him. I had to find a spot in which we could talk, but one sufficiently deafening to make it impossible for directional mikes to pick anything up. Finally, I settled on the left edge of the floor, the opposite side to the stage. Above us was the shimmering image of a body that was little more than wafers of skin and big, dead eyes.

Frankie was still pulsating to the music.

'Has he taken anything?' I asked Ruth.

She shook her head.

I took his wasted cheeks in my fingers and could feel the dampness on them, not so much perspiration as a cold sweat. 'Frankie, we've got to talk,' I told him.

'Yeah,' he said distractedly. 'What did Casas say?'

'His name's Santos.'

He shook his head hard to loosen the grip of my hands on his head. He did it again and I relented. Frankie unfastened the remaining buttons of his shirt. It was drenched by now, clinging to his body like a sheet in a morgue. This was nothing remarkable in a club where several men had bared their torsos. But what Frankie revealed made me frantic.

His abdomen, the little flesh around his ribcage, was covered in bruises.

Ruth put her hand lightly on his cheek. 'Oh, my baby,' she said.

'Who?' I asked, but really I should have asked why.

'They wanted to know about Casas,' Frankie said.

'Who wanted to know?' I said.

'Feds,' he said.

'The police?'

'No,' he said. 'US Feds.'

Suddenly another piece of the jigsaw fitted. Frankie's unexpected return wasn't just a homecoming. It was an escape.

Frankie's trembling grew worse, his left hand and then his forearm convulsing. With his right hand, he reached into his trouser pocket, pulled out a small, dark plastic bottle. Holograms of the dead danced in the air. The bottle slipped out of Frankie's fingers. It rolled on the floor and I grabbed it. Frankie tried to snatch it; my hands were too quick and I saw the label. Then I saw my brother in a different light.

I realised that his deteriorating behaviour was not caused by what he had taken but by what he had forgotten to take. It was a complex compound, but my experience of the law told me what its key constituent was – lithium.

# Chapter Thirteen

Ruth and I watched Frankie sleeping. Of course, he was in my bed, and I'd known from the moment I handed him my house keys that I was destined to be sleeping on the sofa. He slept as I always remembered him, curled up, foetus-like, on his side, both hands tucked under his face, between his cheek and the pillow.

My boxing posters adorned every wall of the loft flat, a renovated river warehouse: Sugar Ray Leonard versus Marvin Hagler, Tommy 'Hitman' Hearns, Dave 'Boy' Green and his wild haymakers, the one and only Ali. On both sides of the bed were duplicated piles of Unused Material from done and dusted legal briefs. Murders and guns and blood-spatter patterns around my brother.

'How serious?' I whispered to Ruth.

'He's taking just a weak lithium derivative,' she replied.

'Meaning?'

'It's not serious.' Then she looked up at me and her eyes were moist. 'That's what he told me.'

Frankie groaned quietly to himself; he shuffled his legs under the duvet, then resumed his original position.

'How could this have happened?' I asked.

She took my hand and edged me out of the room.

We stood in the corridor together and I switched off the light as the night music of the city played around us. A police

helicopter beat the air above in search of a burglar. Car headlamps raced across the walls, before the brakes squealed at the junction. Across the road there was a party, and I felt the bass. Train slept farther down the landing.

'Don't worry,' Ruth whispered to me.

'I can't help it,' I said.

'I know.'

I put my arms around the back of her neck, wrist over wrist, pulling her towards me. She eased away.

'I'm sorry,' she said.

'Don't you want to?'

'What do you think? But there's something I've been trying to tell you. I've tried to find the best time, but there is no good time. So I'm going to say it now. I didn't go to Greece.'

'Ibiza? You're ashamed of admitting you went to Ibiza?'

'He called me. He was so ill. I had to go.'

'And you couldn't tell Dad or me you went to New York?'

'I didn't want to lie to you, but he made me promise.'

'So there you two were for two weeks swanning around Manhattan?'

'I stayed with him in the hospital for the first week, if that's what you mean.'

'Hospital?'

'He was near exhaustion. The pressure he's under. Anything can break if you put it under enough stress. He's beginning to break.'

Frankie turned over in the bed and I felt as if Ruth and I were his parents, standing outside the bedroom of our sick child discussing his illness.

'He knows something about this murder,' I said.

'I was so frightened when I saw him in that hospital ward. His eyes, that look that says I'm too scared to tell. Your brother's on something.'

'I know.'

'Not just the lithium. Something else. He's obsessed with that aluminium case.'

'I think we should look inside,' I said.

Ruth nodded and then said, 'Hold me. Please.'

I was aware of her breasts pressed against my chest, but knew that she did not intend the moment to be sexual.

'There I was nursing him,' she said, 'mothering him the best I could. And I felt . . . sick with myself. I resented him. I just don't know who I am to you lot any more. Mother, daughter, sister – take your pick.'

'You're a woman of many talents.'

'And no life. Not of my own. Last week in the cellar, your father and I were doing the kegs and it was just a larking-around day at work, and he called me Maggie. Talk about confusing.'

My mother's name.

'Poor guy was so embarrassed.'

'He was probably happy. Thinking about the old days.'

'We laughed. But I could see how sad he really was. How it hurts him every single day.'

'So what do you want?' I asked.

'What I can't have,' she said. She paused and I held my breath, hoping. 'No one will approve of us being together. Not so soon. You know that.'

'I approve one hundred per cent,' I said, touching her face.

'Don't tell him about us,' she said.

'I've no secrets from him,' I replied.

'Brief, boxer, the one honest cop. And do you know who you really are? You're that little boy who used to run after his big brother.'

'I'm not running away from him now,' I told her.

'No matter what he's done?'

'No,' I said.

She put her lips to my right ear and whispered, 'Let's not talk any more. I'm tired. Can I stay over?'

From my bedroom I heard a rustling of sheets and then could discern Frankie's drugged voice calling out, 'Davey?'

Ruth slept on the sofa bed while I flattened Train's Lazy-boy and dozed the best I could on that. It didn't really work and mostly I lay on my side watching her sleep.

A noise woke me and I saw Ruth moving around the room, brushing her hair. She was fully dressed. She came across to me and kissed me lightly on the forehead. 'Deliveries,' she said.

'Let me help.'

'You need your beauty sleep,' she said, running her fingers through my hair.

I got out of bed and pulled on some training stuff. By the time we reached the bar, the delivery had arrived and we opened the hatches so that the kegs could be rolled down the chute into the cellar. Once inside, I rolled kegs to the pumps, while she checked that the piping was clean.

'He said you knew one of the cops,' she said over her shoulder.

'Yes.'

'A woman cop?'

I pretended to busy myself with a barrel of cheap bitter. 'Are we selling any of this rubbish?'

She stopped working. 'Yes, we're selling tons of that rubbish and the woman cop was Ellen, wasn't it?'

'It's been years since I've seen her. You know that.'

'Has she changed?'

'Not much.'

'Which means you probably still fancy her.'

'Hey, that was a trick question.'

'Have you thought of sleeping with Ellen again? Tell me the truth.'

'Sometimes. Not very often.'

'Did you think of her last night? When we slept in the same room?'

'I don't know. I don't think so.'

'Good,' she said, and continued occupying herself with the taps. She drew some beer into a glass to check it.

'Hang on, any relationship between us is on hold, but you don't want me even to think about another woman?'

'Did I ever claim to be a hundred per cent rational?' She swirled the liquid in the glass, smelled it. 'Do you ever think about how things could turn out for us?'

'Never.'

'Liar. What do you see?'

'Nothing.'

'I know when you're lying.'

'Not now, please.'

'No, now, or I'll make you drink this,' she said, thrusting the glass in my direction.

'OK, OK. But don't get spooked.'

'I won't. So?'

'So I see this mysterious woman coming up this long aisle and I'm so gobsmacked with how she looks that all I can say is: "Wow".'

'Wait, how do you know it's me?'

'Because you're nowhere else in the church.'

By the time I returned to the flat, Train was already up, making his way in baggy New York Yankees joggers towards the kitchen. He favoured his injured leg just a fraction. Most people would not have seen it, but I had made Night Train Nelson's rehabilitation part of my daily business. In truth, I quite liked having someone to boss around, as Frankie had bossed me around most of my life.

'Giving you gyp?' I asked him.

He tried to walk normally, but in the process made it worse. 'No problemo,' he said.

We were in the small kitchenette now. A kitchen in an all-

male flat. That hygiene-free zone, where men park their crusty dishes till they give up and throw them out, tastefully kitted out with a fridge in which to store the beers and grow furry meat. Our fridge was full of canned and bottled beer specifically because Train and I were not allowed to drink any. Chalk one up to the Catholic fathers. The only way to fight temptation is to stare it in the eye, that was the theory. It drove Train nuts.

He filled the kettle while I sat at the small wooden table.

'Coffee?' he asked. 'I am allowed to have coffee?'

'Make it strong,' I said.

'Davey, I hate to break this to you on an empty stomach, but the bills keep piling up.'

'I'll have to see the bank manager again.'

'You were at the limit last time. He said no more money.'

'I've got this big case now. Maybe he'll reconsider.'

'Look, I've put away a few pesetas from the ring days. Say the word.'

'Thanks, but no.'

'OK, stop paying me, then. You can't afford it.'

'We'll manage. This case will pay its way.' I took time to tell him the background to the Santos case, realising as I was doing so that I was also trying to convince myself that the murder on the *Corinth* would answer our financial problems. I went to the hall and removed the Polaroids from my jacket, almost as corroboration of how dreadful the crime was and consequently how notorious the case might become.

Night Train Nelson was a man of many words, but now he was silent. He didn't even touch the pictures of the dead man from the boat; he used the bottom of his cup to move one photo off the other so that he could get a better view.

In the light of day, the images of death took on another dimension. I felt sick.

'Dead?' Train finally said.

'No, Train, alive and well and playing golf in Miami,' I said.

We both laughed. It was inappropriate, I know, but it was

one way of dealing with it, because both of us had seen death at first hand. We each knew that the first-hand experience of someone else's death was like a virus in your blood, something that recurs, like malaria or glandular fever, something that enters your body and doesn't leave.

'So?' I asked him.

Train had served time. Train had seen more dark corners than I could ever imagine. He bent his bulk over the Polaroids, still ensuring that he did not touch them. His eyes narrowed as he scanned the burned flesh.

'Blowtorch?' he asked.

I nodded. 'Some kind of torture?'

He winced at this, and made a clicking sound of disagreement. 'Ask me, this isn't about torture.'

'Come on.'

'No, hear me out, Davey. It is torture. Any fool could tell you that. But it ain't only *about* torture.'

'Then what?'

Train stood up and stretched his leg, rubbed his chin, contorting the mass of his jowls. 'The guy who did this ain't no psycho.'

'He's after something,' I agreed. The desecration of the body was too perfect, too well designed. If there was rage here, it was controlled.

'I could be wrong, but looks like he's after the truth,' Train said.

'What the victim knew?'

'Know that, know your killer,' Train replied.

My mind scanned through what was known. Jack Telfer, formerly witness protection, now working undercover. Sebastian Santos on DEA files, a fingerprint match. A body mutilated to a plan, to a pattern I had never even heard about in those drunken macho conversations when hard-nosed cops try to spook out their pals. A necklace of burned flesh where the throat had been.

Frankie entered wearing my silk dressing gown, one I had

bartered for in Chinatown when I was in a short lived martial arts phase.

Train smiled at him and said, 'Batman returns.'

Frankie's hands were shoved into the pockets of the gown. Now he removed his right hand and said, 'Dr Jekyll needs his potion.' He opened his hand and there was the bottle of pills.

'Jesus, Frankie,' I said.

'Didn't little bro' tell you, Train?' Frankie said. 'I'm a split personality. A schizoid, pill-popping, insane freak.'

Train stood up. 'I'm gonna let you children play,' he said.

'I'm only joking, Troy,' Frankie said.

'I know,' Train said. He looked at me. 'I'll put out some feelers,' he continued, indicating the photos.

'Thanks,' I replied.

As Train reached the door, he whispered to Frankie, 'He didn't tell me a thing.'

Frankie pursed his lips and nodded.

'Anyhow, I'm going to return *Singing in the Rain*,' Train said. 'Fined me three quid last week for *My Fair Lady*. Like anyone else's ever going to take out his old musicals around here. That guy in the video store, he's some kind of Nazi.'

When Train had gone, Frankie glanced at the Polaroids on the table and the strength seeped out of his legs. He slumped down next to me. 'Oh, God,' he said, putting his head in his hands. 'Can we get something to eat? I mean, before we talk. You see, what with the medicine, if I don't eat, I begin to, you know, hear . . . things.'

I stood up quickly. 'Oh, Jesus, of course. Let's get breakfast at Panama Joe's.' I quickly cleared away the coffee cups, knocking one over in my haste.

He burst out laughing. 'You are such a sucker,' he said.

'I am going to kill you.'

'Not if I kill me first,' he laughed. 'Eggs Benedict still good at Panama's?' he asked.

'Why don't we go to Dad's for breakfast?' I suggested.

'He doesn't do eggs Benedict.'

'Please,' I said.

Frankie eased himself to his feet, placing one bony hand on the table for balance. His head swayed a little. 'What does he know about the case?'

'Not much,' I said. 'I want to be the one to tell him.'

We crunched our way along Cable Street, Frankie dressed in one of my Shetland jumpers which hung around him like a tent. He took a deep breath of the river air, but then started coughing. When he regained some control, he asked, 'Why do you think it wasn't a mistake?'

'What?'

'Last night I asked you if splitting from Ruth was a mistake and you said no.'

There could be no pretence: I wanted to discuss exactly this, but I needed to test what Ruth had told me, and I thought I saw a way to get to the truth. Was I proud of my behaviour? Definitely not, but I tried to remember that Ruth and I hadn't actually done anything wrong.

'This is between Ruth and you,' I said. 'I should never have said what I did.'

'What are you talking about? Has she said something to you?'

'She told me she went to New York when you were ill. Clearly, you don't need to tell me about such things. I suppose my opinion is worthless.'

'Not to me, Davey. I'm sorry. I was going through hell out there.'

'And you couldn't tell me?'

'I didn't want to put any pressure on you. I know how you're struggling to get your practice off the ground. Really, I value your opinion about Ruth.'

'I can't judge properly. I don't even know why you two broke up, so I think it's best if I keep out of it.'

'No way. You're not getting out of it that easily. God, it was never meant to be a state secret anyway. She wanted kids, that's all.'

I stopped momentarily when I heard it; I felt ashamed that I had played him for the information, but at least now I knew. 'What's wrong with kids?' I asked.

'It's not kids. It's me. What right have I got to create something like me? And don't try to say something nice or to argue, because Ruth and I have been round the houses on it all. It's me, Davey.'

'Come on,' I said, putting my arm around his shoulders.

We walked onward and Frankie talked. We passed a youth squatting in a deserted doorway, wrapped in blankets with ice in his hair from his night on the street. He was asleep with his mouth wide open.

'London wasn't like this when we were kids,' I said.

'Yes, it was. We just didn't see it,' Frankie said. 'That's what he – let's call him Santos, then – that's what he can do. He can make you see what's really there.'

'How'd you meet him?'

'One day, he just comes into my office in Manhattan, without an appointment, quietly knocks on my door out of nowhere. Boom, he's there. Why he chose me, I just don't know.'

'What did he want?' I asked.

'He comes into my office and says he has money to invest. So I ask him how much money. And he says more money than it would take eternity to spend.'

'It's a good pitch.'

'No, Davey, it was a good sell. Then he asks if I can imagine how long eternity might be. I come out with the for ever, till the end of time stuff. Then he puts up his hand. He was quiet for a moment and then he told me to imagine a rock the length and breadth of the night sky, reaching into every corner you could see or imagine. And imagine that every one thousand years a bird flies out to the rock and brushes it with its wing. Eternity is how long it would take to reduce that rock to nothing.'

I shuddered as I squinted up into the pale blue skies above the city, streaked with high morning clouds. 'That's a long fucking time,' I said. 'How much did Santos have?'

'Bottom line? Half a bill'.'

'Half a billion? What the hell could you do with five hundred million?'

'Easy,' Frankie said.

'What?'

'Buy a new life, for starters,' he said.

'Why would you need a new life?'

'I'm sick of my job. Wall Street, investment banking – it's on the way out. Internet portal companies are advising and trading on-line quicker and cheaper. They're "de-intermediating" the middle man. Us. Me.'

'So what would you do?'

'If I had the money? Set up my own Internet bank. You won't believe what they can do now. Maybe one day I'll show you. If I ever get the chance.'

'Frankie?'

His eyes grew more frightened as he recounted the words that had haunted him all this time. 'Five hundred million dollars and eternity to spend it. Eternity. That's how long the agony lasts. How long sinners are bitten by serpents and branded and cut up and trapped in engines of torture.'

'Jesus, Frankie, you don't believe all that stuff.'

His eyes were wide, and he gripped me hard with both arms. 'I'm still not sure about Heaven. I hope it is somewhere up there. But I know about Hell. And it exists. And Santos has Hell all around him. It trails behind him like stale cigar smoke in a room.'

'He's spooked you, that's all. Like you used to scare the shit out of me about all that Crimson Lady ghost stuff from Gosburn.'

'He said that even when you were cut to pieces and torn apart and eaten by demons, when there was no more left of you, then your body was made whole again so that the torture could start all over.'

'OK, I won't do the case.'

'No,' he said, his voice now barely more than a whisper. 'You need the work. And I want you to do it.'

'Why?'

'I want you to prove me wrong.'

'About what?'

A strong breeze climbed into the leafless branches of trees along the riverbank and there was a beating of wings above our heads as silhouetted birds took flight over the roof of the bar.

'About what, Frankie?'

'About the fact that he is evil,' he said.

# Chapter Fourteen

'How could you represent a cop-killer?' Dad said. He wore moccasin slippers and his huge river jersey, knotted with wool as thick as rope.

'I'm trying to help Frankie,' I replied.

'You're trying to help yourself. You're always helping yourself.'

'Yes, in part. I need a big case like this. I was going to tell you.'

'You're a liar.'

'He was, Dad,' Frankie said.

'Don't try to cover for him,' Dad told him 'You're always trying to protect him.'

'Let's all calm down,' Ruth said.

'It's him,' Dad fumed. 'He does it deliberately.'

'That's right. I'll clear all my clients with you in future. Check that the boys in the bar approve.'

Dad clutched his chest. His breath was tight and short. 'You do it to make me ill.'

Ruth made him sit on a chair. She shook her head at me, gesturing that I should go for the sake of my father's health.

It was about ten minutes before she came out front into the saloon, where I sat in the dim light by the pool table.

'He does love you,' she told me.

'He doesn't show it.'

'Does he have to?'

'Yes,' I said.

There was a clicking behind us as Frankie came through to the bar area.

'I've had enough of all this,' I told him. 'I want to know what the hell is going on.'

Frankie leaned over the pool table and took the black ball and rolled it slowly over the chalk-marked felt until it hit the far cushion with a dull thud and then bounced back towards him.

He said, 'That aluminium briefcase?'

'What about it?'

'It belongs to Santos.'

Before we left, I crept upstairs as quietly as I could. I looked in on Dad as he lay in his socks on the neatly made bed. His eyes were half closed and he did not speak, but with the fingers of his hand he beckoned me in.

'I'm sorry,' I said.

'Look after your brother,' he said.

I nodded.

Downstairs, Frankie shoved as many packets of crisps and peanuts as he could into a supermarket bag.

'Provisions,' he said.

We walked out, the three of us, towards my office. I can't remember now what we discussed, but I don't think we spoke much at all. Certainly, I was distracted by thoughts of Santos's briefcase. We passed the homeless kid in the doorway and Frankie placed the plastic bag next to him without a word. The youth said thanks and Frankie smiled, embarrassed. Soon we were standing in my front office and we had the aluminium briefcase on the reception desk.

'Should we be doing this?' Ruth asked.

'No,' Frankie said.

'Let's do it anyway,' I told them, and no one dissented.

I examined the matt metal surface, with strengthening ribs around it. There were two locks on the front, each with a separate combination. Both locks were set to '000'.

'It will take for ever to find the combination,' Ruth said.

'Who said anything about a combination?' I replied.

I went to the cupboard under the stairs and returned with a chisel and claw hammer.

Before I could force open the lock, Frankie put his hand over mine. 'Do you know why I got food for that homeless kid?' he asked.

'Guilt?'

'Fear. Shortly after I met Santos, I started reading around the things he had spoken about. Thomas à Kempis. Remember the fathers talking about him?'

'We never listened.'

'We should have listened,' Frankie said. 'The Imitation of Christ.' Then he continued in a voice that I still recognised as his, while it was altered, more distant, haunted. 'Very soon you will reach the end of your life. Think then what good things you have done.'

'You're not a bad person,' I said.

'I'm not a good one either. Santos says there's an invisible war going on. He says it's always been the same war. Between positive and negative. Left and right. Light and shade.'

'What's it got to do with you?'

'I'm in Santos's debt. I had a problem. I owed some people money. Santos solved the problem for me.'

'So now you pay him back.'

'People died. People died in ways you don't want to know. No one said it was Santos. There was no evidence that it was Santos. But the problem went away just as he had predicted.'

'So do you think he killed that man?' I asked.

'On the boat?' Frankie shook his head. 'Not his style. He's not that careless.'

'Do you know why he was on that yacht?'

'Corporate entertainment,' Frankie said. 'You don't have to do this for me.'

'Yes, I do.'

'You can walk away from Santos's case. Some of those people who died in the US? I think they committed suicide. Did things to their own bodies you can't believe.'

'That's not our problem.'

'I bet they thought that. I bet they thought, I am strong, I can handle it, it's going to be someone else's problem. But he gets down inside you, shows you what you are. It's not his strength. It's your weakness.'

'Our strength,' Ruth said, 'the three of us together. Remember that.'

'If we stick together,' I said, 'he's going to have the fight of his life.'

'I think he'd enjoy that,' Frankie said. 'Whatever's in there, I want you to know that I did nothing wrong. It was Santos.' His eyes pleaded with me. 'You've got to believe me.'

'Don't you see? I don't care what the truth is. I just don't want you to get hurt.'

Frankie was silent for a moment. Then he said, 'I wish you two didn't have to worry about me.'

'Tough,' Ruth told him.

'Let's open the box, Frankie,' I said.

He stood aside, and I began working at the locks with the hammer and chisel. The moment the briefcase came open, the ringing began.

A miniature cellphone lay on top of a stack of papers. At the bottom of the box was a white, round plastic disc with a black sensor in the middle. It was no bigger than the circumference of a small coffee cup. I recognised the device from an amphetamine factory trial. It was a light switch. Back then, the light switch

activated infrared cameras when anyone broke into the drugs factory. Here, it set off the phone.

My fingers edged towards the ringing. The matt black plastic was cool, smooth, ergonomically advanced. An expensive toy.

I offered it to Frankie. He shook his head.

I put the mobile to my ear and the ringing stopped as a message at the other end clicked on.

I recognised the unnervingly calm voice.

'Francis,' the message began, 'you disappoint me.'

'Santos,' I said.

'Or perhaps you don't,' the message continued. 'Perhaps I chose you because I knew curiosity was your ruling passion. You will look at the documents below, I am sure. Then judge. Judge whether they offer us any hope.'

The message clicked off and the line went dead. We looked at each other.

'I'm going to check the papers,' I told him.

There was an inch or so of white sheets. Some loose, others stapled together into reports. They were official documents, with official stamps. They were from both sides of the Atlantic. Frankie looked at me, his eyes wide, seeking help, guidance. There was an unsealed envelope with photographs inside. They depicted Santos, but several years younger. Santos at church on his wedding day, his bride on his arm. Santos and Constanza on a beach. I wondered if it was the beach where he'd first met her. Santos in love. Other photos of him cradling a baby proudly. The children older now, laughing and messing around with their father as they tried to give their massive dog a bath.

I handed the photos to Ruth.

'She's stunning,' she said of the wedding photo.

I didn't tell Ruth, but Constanza Santos reminded me a little of her – the dark hair, the look of distant serenity. I began reading the documents beneath. Then I was silent for a moment.

'What are they?' she asked.

'Santos was an informer,' I said.

# Chapter Fifteen

Ellen had called, telling me in a matter-of-fact way, as if this were just another case, that the NCS was about to interview Santos. Another custody sergeant was on duty now, the shifts having changed, and this sergeant, of Asian origin, had some kind of port wine stain on his right cheek. There was a radio quietly playing classical piano behind the high wooden counter of the custody desk. It reminded me of the Schubert concert Ruth took me to on our second unofficial date.

At the cell door, the sergeant asked me, 'Do you want a consultation room?'

'No,' I said. 'But I want your radio.'

'It's not my radio,' he replied.

'So you won't mind if I borrow it.'

He didn't have either the energy or the interest to contest this. I entered Santos's cell, bringing the sound of a gentle sonata with me, and was assailed by a sickeningly pungent smell, like over-sweet perfume. I was taken aback by how fragile he looked, his long white hair darkened with moisture. He sat on the mattress at the end of the cell and did not get up. He wore another paper suit and someone had given him a small, poisonous cigarette. Little more than a stub remained.

'Beethoven,' he said, slowly exhaling smoke. 'One of the early sonatas. I prefer the Doors myself.'

I immediately turned the dial of the portable and tuned into a programme in French. I turned the volume higher and approached him.

'A nice detail,' he said, looking up. He offered me the cigarette, and I could see the wet end where it had been in his mouth, tapered as if he had chewed it. 'They allowed me a shower.' He ran his fingers through the wet strands of hair, smoothing out the knots. 'Sadly, no conditioner. I once had hair like yours. This isn't my natural colour. You and me, dark-haired boys.'

'So what happened?'

'I forget the technical term. It's some kind of traumatic alopecia. Eventually it will all fall out. Grief works strangely on the human form.'

I lowered my head to his ear. 'We'd better talk.'

'Surely you know much more by now.'

'I want to hear it from you.'

'You don't know how much you already know,' he said. 'You're like the dying man walking right past the oasis in a sandstorm.'

I turned the radio to full volume. The cacophony of French voices reverberated around the walls of his cell.

'*Mes deux frères et moi*,' he said, '*nous étions touts enfants Abel était l'aîné et moi j'étais le plus petit.*'

'What the hell are you saying?'

'Victor Hugo. About brothers. How is your brother Francis? He reminds me of my boy. Charming, but spiteful like a viper when he doesn't get his way. Now you're silent. What are you thinking?'

'That you killed that man.'

'Everyone thinks I killed that man. So many people have convinced themselves that I killed that man that it simply cannot be the truth. Think. I kill a man in that . . . fashion. Then fire a flare to waken all of London. Do you consider me to be stupid?'

'Arrogant, perhaps.'

He stamped the cigarette out on the floor. His accent was neutral, words without origin, a voice of his own construction. A coil of black smoke rose from the cell floor. 'When people uniformly consider someone guilty, what does your experience of the law tell you is the truth?'

'He's guilty.'

'Always?'

'Almost.'

'So not always.'

'Virtually.'

'Not always.'

'No.'

'Could I be one of those cases?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'Because there's no other credible explanation for the murder.'

'Except the missing man,' Santos said.

'There's no evidence of another man.'

'Then you must find it.'

'I'm not chasing after shadows.'

'No, you're chasing after your brother. You're going to do anything to clean up after your brother, aren't you? I'm not criticising you. I would do anything for my family. I understand why you're doing it. Maybe you'll come to understand me.'

'Was my brother on the boat?'

Santos was silent.

'Why don't you tell me everything?' I said.

'My wife once said something like that, and when I told her, she was infinitely more unhappy. Truth is an overrated commodity, isn't it?'

'Try me.'

'This truth is like a medicine. One pill at a time.'

'You think you're so clever.'

He paused and looked at me, eyes dead and still. 'No, only

clever enough to know that you and your brother were tempted to look in my briefcase.'

I was silent momentarily, and it was enough for him.

'I see,' he said. 'Then you know.'

'I know you're just another pond-life informer.'

'Are we all not descended from the primeval pond?'

He stood now and I could feel his breath on my face with every word. It smelled of the smoke. I was breathing the air from his lungs. The radio poured out its voices.

'Who did you inform about?'

'Revealing the whole truth may cost me my life, which I accept you consider as disposable. But it is all I have left. If we are to fight this case, I fear I must entrust it to you. I have no interest in winning your friendship. We do not even need to like each other. I shall let the facts speak for themselves. So if you're wondering what will be my defence, it's simple. My defence is the evidence. The truth – whatever that may mean – is my defence. And my star witness will be your brother.'

'Leave him out of it,' I told him.

'No. I was so worried about him in New York. His illness . . . well, if it wasn't for young Ruth. What a ministering angel you two share.'

I grabbed Santos's shoulders, dropping the radio on the mattress behind him. It bounced, continued playing. 'Whatever hold you had over my brother is finished. Whatever problem you had with him is now a problem with me. If he owes you money, tell me how much. If it's a favour, tell me what you want.'

Santos laughed and the dried scabs on his lips cracked. Blood-red lips now, along with his white hair, his black eyebrows. 'He's right,' he continued, revelling in his moment. 'You'll be harder to break.'

'You haven't broken Frankie.'

'Haven't I? When you look at him, do you see the same brother who left England? When you speak to him, does he speak as he did?'

'You can't touch him now.'

'Can't I?'

'You're stuck in this dungeon.'

Santos broke free of my grip with a burst of remarkable strength. 'Do you really imagine walls can stop me? These are the institutions of men. You know how they can tumble and be made transparent when the right levers are pulled. Didn't I bring you here to me?'

'I came because of Frankie.'

'Exactly. The blood running through your veins, the blood coursing through his. You and I must ensure that none of it is spilt.'

'Was that a threat?'

'Why do you think your brother was brought here? You cannot outrun my reach, counsel.'

'But I can drop the case.'

'Then you'll lose your last chance to limit the damage.'

'Damage?'

'That your brother has caused. I accept you will not care what he really has done. I realise that crimes in the world and crimes in the family are measured by different laws. You can throw the case in court and keep me inside. You can deflect it on to paths that lead away from your brother. What greater love hath a man than to lay down his professional life for his brother? Is there any limit to what we would do for our families? I think you're going to find out.'

I turned around, banged on the cell door.

'An undercover policeman is tortured to death on a yacht in the centre of the city. You know there are dozens of lawyers who would chew off their own arm to get this case,' he said.

'And how many of them could win it?'

'No, you're curious.'

'About what?'

'You know.'

And I did.

'But if I must, I will spell out what we both already know,' he said wearily. 'Little brother, poor, put-upon, always-second best little brother, finally has a chance to show the world – or more importantly his father, which is the only part of the world that counts – how wrong everyone has been about the boys. Little brother is the hero. Big brother is the black sheep, just as you've always felt, though no one would ever believe you. Isn't it exciting to discover how bad big brother has been?'

'What if you're right? What if I decide to throw the case and land you with life? How could you take that risk?'

'Because I'm confident of the evidence. And I'll know where you're coming from. If you become convinced of my innocence, how much easier it will be for the court. How many times have your represented murderers who have sought to befriend you?'

He was right, but I would never give him the satisfaction of admitting so.

'Can you face one innocent man who declares from the start that he is not your friend – but may be the very opposite? I realise we are nothing to each other. What am I to you? Another body on the battlefield whose rings can be robbed.'

'If I decide you're guilty, I'm dropping the case.'

'Agreed.'

'If my brother asks me to, I'm dropping the case.'

'I think he'll keep you in. But I must warn you now. It's going to get tougher.'

'How?'

'I was only present at the birth of my eldest child, my son Gabriel. I don't know how they do it in your country, but back home they let the father cut the cord. And you know, I didn't want to. Knowing what I know of this world, I thought, how could I be the one to deliver you into it? But the doctor said life is a blessing. I wish I'd encountered that doctor on the yacht.'

I bent down and switched off the radio. There were noises in the corridor. Rapid footsteps outside.

'What's going on?' I asked.

Santos's cracked-lip smile returned. 'Whenever I went on a long journey with my children we would invent a game. Let's invent one now. Let's play Who Was on the Boat? Was Francis Kilkenny on the boat? Come on, counsel. You're not joining in.'

The footsteps were ever louder. There was the scraping of metal against metal as the key slid into the lock. The door swung open inches from Santos's face. Ellen stood in the corridor with her arms folded.

'We're going to interview him about the human tissue,' she said to me.

'What tissue?' I asked.

'We've found fragments of Jack Telfer's skin under your client's nails.'

My eyes shot towards Sebastian Santos. He remained calm and said, 'I think we know whether or not Miss Ross wants to play.'

# Chapter Sixteen

On the video screens along the end wall were images of Telfer. Looks that might be described as rugged, but polished up for an official photograph; he wore a charcoal suit and ex-armed forces striped purple and blue tie and stared into the camera, unaware of the demise that lay ahead for him. As Ellen stood with her back to the video wall, the face and shoulders of Jack Telfer appeared all around her; the blue haze of electrons and static from the screens caused the odd strand of her hair to dance.

'Do you recognise this man?' she said to Santos.

Leybourne sat opposite. 'I repeat that it may harm your defence if you do not mention when questioned any matter you may later rely upon in court,' he said.

'So do you recognise this man?' Ellen asked again.

'You are obstructing my view,' Santos said politely.

Leybourne shook his head in anger. There were at least four clear images of Telfer for Santos to choose from, but Ellen moved completely out of the way. She picked up one of the remote controls.

'I recognise him,' Santos said, aiming his response at me.

Ellen pressed a button. The image flashed. There was another picture of Telfer. The light now vanished from his eyes. Not Telfer the cop, but Telfer the corpse. Strung out in his death pose, the flesh of his throat burned.

'Do you still recognise him?' Ellen said.

'That is argumentative,' I interrupted. An instinctive thing. A defence hack's reflex, programmed so deep that it came out before I realised.

Santos pounced at my words. 'My lawyer suggests that I do not answer the question,' he said.

'Is that really your professional advice, Mr Kilkenny?' Ellen said.

'My client was shown this photograph yesterday. If you have any new material, then deal with it. You mentioned a skin sample?'

'For the record,' Ellen began in perfunctory fashion, 'the detained person was examined for trace evidence beneath his fingernails.'

I could feel the difficult balance that she struggled with, wondering, hoping, that one day this exchange, her words, these moments, would be replayed in a court of law and form part of the evidence against Sebastian Santos. In that hope she laboured her explanations for the benefit of a jury that might never be convened.

'The traces of skin from beneath the fingernails of Sebastian Santos matched samples of skin obtained from the body of Jack Telfer,' she said.

I knew that this would be crucial evidence against Santos. The key word was 'trace'. The most fundamental tenet of forensic science. In human contact there is a legacy of trace evidence. Something small, perhaps. Particles unseen by the naked eye. But when two people come into contact in a violent situation, there will be some trace.

'Do you allege corresponding scratches on the body of the deceased?' I asked. My game plan in police interviews. Me driving it. Questioning the questioners, going on the attack.

I had thought it was a simple question. But Santos looked steadily at Ellen, who for an instant lost her way. She glanced anxiously at Leybourne, whose mouth tightened.

'There *were* scratches on Telfer's body?' I asked, more concerned.

Still silence.

'Ellen?'

'There were no corresponding scratches,' she admitted quietly.

The question I didn't ask, the follow-up I did not need to ask, was: How on earth did Telfer's skin get under Santos's nails? I glanced up at the dead body of Jack Telfer and tried to reassess the evidence. But then Sebastian Santos did it for me.

'It is possible,' he said, 'that if the scratches were located at the victim's throat, then the incineration might mask them.'

The four other people in the room checked each other for reactions.

'Of course,' Santos continued, 'if your suspect did that, then he would be both dangerous and ingenious.'

'A genius would've washed his hands,' Leybourne said.

Santos addressed me. 'Isn't it near impossible to remove all skin traces by washing, Mr Kilkenny?'

'Is that a confession?' Ellen asked.

He looked at her as a teacher might a child. 'I can't very well confess to something I didn't do,' he replied. Then he targeted me. 'Would the real killer have said such a thing, counsel? In your experience?'

In the looking-glass world that now constituted this interview, this upside-down realm into which Santos had plunged us all, the others waited for my reply.

'No,' I said.

'See?' Santos said.

'Unless he was double-bluffing,' I added. 'Unless his pleasure came from sailing close to the wind, seeing what he could get away with.'

'Do you think I'm playing games?' Santos asked me.

'Do you have a case you wish my client to answer?' I asked.

'It's simple. He was on the boat. Jack Telfer was on the boat.

Jack Telfer is dead and your client has his skin traces under his nails. Your client has lied about his name. He's given no proper explanation for his presence on the yacht. Nor for the death.'

'What about my motive?' Santos asked. 'Without a motive you have no case.'

'You should have asked your legal representative whether we have to prove motive,' Leybourne said, with no pretence at concealing his disgust.

'They don't need to prove a motive in law,' I told Santos.

'Means, motive, opportunity – just Perry Mason fiction,' Ellen said.

'But hasn't history taught that people act from motive?' Santos asked, as if this were an academic debate and he would be fascinated by our views.

'Sociopaths don't,' I said. 'Sociopaths typically don't feel remorse or guilt.'

'What do they feel, then?'

'The enjoyment of other people's pain.'

'Or perhaps they're trying to deal with their own,' Santos replied. He nodded fractionally, turned away from me and faced the detectives once more. 'Do you really think, DI Ross, that you're in the presence of a man who incinerates human flesh? Am I such a monster?'

'I've seen beautiful children who have dropped their younger siblings into pans of scalding water and watched as they boil. Looks mean nothing to me,' she said.

I saw pain in Ellen's eyes. The pain I knew she inherited from every victim whose death it became her mission to avenge, and I got the sense that it was always the same mission, to inject a little justice into a world that had abducted and destroyed her brother Peter. Ellen was one of the good people in a bad world.

'Do you have enough to charge my client?' I asked her. As I finished my sentence, before Ellen could reply, there was a soft knocking on the interview-room door.

Ellen said, 'Interview suspended.' She turned off the tape recorder and the spools stopped turning.

Once she left the room, I heard whispering outside. I glanced over my shoulder to see Santos sitting with his arms folded in precisely the manner Ellen always adopted. Leybourne scowled at him. Finally, the door opened again and I saw Ellen's troubled face, crow's-feet around her eyes.

'A word,' she said to me, and indicated with a flick of her head that I should follow her outside.

Santos stood slowly. 'I think something's happened,' he said to me in a singsong, mocking voice.

'Put him back in his cell,' I told Leybourne.

'But, counsel, you would leave me with these . . . Britons? Didn't Tacitus say that the natives of this city were the bloodiest in the Roman Empire in the treatment of their prisoners? They slit their throats and hung and crucified them.'

I stepped out into the corridor after Ellen, my eyes blinking under the metres of strip lighting, so much brighter than the dullness of the interview room. I could hear Santos's voice muted by the door as he said, 'And they burned them, counsel, they burned them.'

Ellen shook her head, biting her bottom lip instinctively, trying to work out how to break it to me. 'He was right,' she said.

'About what?'

'There was someone else on the boat. He's alive.'

# Chapter Seventeen

Ellen wanted to review the breaking evidence with the other detectives in the squad and was not yet able to disclose its nature and content. I expected that; I refused to wait with Santos, so I lingered outside, on the steps of the gleaming new building, as walls of reinforced glass rose skyward above my head. The glass was designed to deter eyes that might wish to pry into the nation's most sensitive centre of police operations, but it also had the effect of capturing the city skyline and river views dimly. Clouds were imprinted at the top of the building. The swell of the river at ground level.

I sat on the steps and craved the cigarette Ellen had offered me the previous night. Two gulls spiralled over the water slowly, like flakes of ash over a fire. I watched the patterns they made in the air until I noticed, I can't say how long afterwards, that Ellen was standing outside the NCS building. In her hand was a brown A4 envelope, folded double. Strands of her red hair fanned across her forehead in the light breeze, but she didn't seem to notice.

'Seen any dolphins?' she asked. 'Tell me if you see those bloody dolphins, Dave.'

I heard the gulls crying to each other behind me. 'What is it, Elles?'

'You decide,' she said. She held the package out towards me. 'We've been sent a video.'

That first time, I insisted that I watch the video without Santos. But I did not want to watch it alone, and although Ellen offered me a private room, I asked her to stay. We stood, our shoulders lightly touching, swaying apart, touching. The beginning of the tape fizzed and spluttered; outlines of shapes ghosted across the screen until I adjusted the tracking.

'You're doing all this for Frankie?' she asked. 'He's lucky to have a brother like you.'

'I need the work.'

'It was meant to be a compliment, Dave. You never were good at taking compliments.'

'You'd do the same for Pete.'

There was a jump-cut and the snowstorm of interference cleared. A huge pink shape reached towards us, engulfing the entire screen. The shape withdrew, revealing that it was a man's hand, with lines on his palm like cuts. The lens of the videocam was being adjusted.

'I'd do anything for Pete,' she said.

The screen hand with its thick, fat fingers was joined by another, and together they held open a sheet of paper. A newspaper.

'Wait. He brings it closer,' Ellen said.

The front page of the newspaper now jerked towards the screen. It was a tabloid. I screwed my eyes to see the date. I need not have bothered. The banner headline resolved that.

'*BOAT OF HORRORS.*'

Ellen said, 'Today's first edition.'

The holder of the paper sat on a stool seven or eight feet distant from the camera. He was strangely curtailed, as if his body had been lopped off beneath the knees. He had a bald head, I concluded, but the very crown of the skull was cut off by the top of the lens.

'Know him?' Ellen asked.

I shook my head in answer.

The man on the screen gathered himself for what lay ahead: his struggle to recount the horrors of the previous night. He kept the newspaper over his thighs, in the way that pensioners sometimes wrap themselves with a car blanket on a park bench. He cleared his throat, coughed badly, a hacking, raw cough. His voice was gentle and simple, almost as if he were telling a child a bedtime story. He would never tell a child this story.

'My . . . my name is . . .' He coughed again. This time he wiped the wetness around his mouth with the back of his fat hand. I estimated he was over fifteen stone.

'My name is Bill Sorensen,' he said. Then, as if he could not entirely believe it himself, he said more slowly, 'Bill Sor-en-sen.' He glanced down at the paper on his knees. 'You can see today's date. And you can see . . . I survived.' His head shook incredulously. 'I survived the boat.'

His words began their work in the back of my mind. I felt sure I had heard of the name Sorensen, but I was positive I'd never seen that face. I put him in his early forties, prematurely bald.

He glanced around his room, which he'd done a good job of disguising. I caught a glimpse of the bottoms of flowery orange curtains to his left. The wall behind him was papered and bubbling. The bed to his right was crisply made, the sheet pulled tight over the pillow. The room had the anonymity of a hotel, a cheap one. Perhaps a motel where they did not ask too many questions.

'Don't try to find me. Don't try to find this room,' he said. 'I am not going to be found.' He leaned forward on his stool. I guessed it was a bath stool.

'This is a statement, a video affidavit. I swear . . .' His hand made a grab for the bed. He picked up a Gideon Bible. He was definitely in a hotel or motel. 'I swear by Almighty God that the

evidence I shall give shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God.'

'Didn't need the "So help me God",' I said. The lawyer in me already picking holes. I sensed a time when I would need to contest this statement.

'He feels he needs it,' Ellen said.

Sorensen continued, his eyes red-rimmed, in contrast to his black-blue eyes. 'I make this statement in pursuance of court proceedings, which I will never attend because . . .' He fought back the tears in his eyes. 'Because I fear for my life.'

'Jesus, he's Section 23'ing it,' I said.

'He was a good man,' Ellen replied. 'Was one of our best. Is.'

I noticed a flashing light outside the window of his room. It was multicoloured, a neon sign. This distracted Sorensen fractionally, and he seemed to lose his drift, but he had already laid the foundations for this video to be played in a court of law by virtue of Section 23 of the Criminal Justice Act. An exceptional provision, whereby evidence may be tendered by a witness who does not attend court. A witness who genuinely fears for his life.

Sorensen glanced from the window on his left to the other side of the room, where I guessed the door was located. He checked the newspaper again, steeling himself as he summoned the knowledge that lay inside him.

I asked, 'How'd you get the tape?'

'Handed in to a commercial radio station's front desk an hour ago.'

'They'll have a security tape.'

'We're checking it.'

Then I thought it through. 'It'll just show Sorensen.'

'Why do you say that?'

'He wouldn't trust something like this to anyone else.' Ellen nodded as I added, 'He's got a one-hour start.'

'He's not a suspect.'

'Then he's a material witness.'

'We won't find him. He's worked deep undercover for years,' Ellen said.

Sorensen ended our dialogue by looking up at the camera. 'I haven't much time,' he said.

He spoke steadily for several minutes. He spoke in a way that revealed years of experience in the difficult art of recounting salient facts. He spoke like a pro.

Jack Telfer and Sorensen were working together undercover. They were working so deep undercover for the National Crime Squad that only a handful of people in the whole force knew. They each had a 'handler', but neither handler knew of the other handler's existence, nor that this was a two-operative assignment. Their terms of engagement were sealed, their mission classified. Until now.

This would soon become public knowledge. It was going to end up in court.

Telfer and Sorensen were targeting some of the richest criminals in the world, those who used the City of London's financial institutions as one vast Laundromat. They were going after the money launderers.

And one of the biggest fish in the sea of dirty money had swum into view. Casas. Casas the deal-maker, the aberrant financial genius reputedly devising the scams. Telfer and Sorensen put out the right kinds of cover story in the darker corridors of financial power in the city. It was like dropping bloodied bait around the fishing boat and then waiting for the sharks to come.

They came.

Using the resources of the NCS, Telfer and Sorensen had obtained excellent criminal 'credentials' as 'players', men with millions of narco-dollars to wash. It required a meet. Casas suggested one of the capital's foremost hotels, right in the middle of Establishment territory, right out in the open. Sorensen considered it an act of breathtaking bravura. But at the last minute, Casas changed the plan. They were to meet on a wharf in

a luxury marina on the north bank of the river, not far from the city.

As I heard all this, my heart beat strongly. Frankie had arranged the yacht. I had suggested it to him.

Everything changed when they arrived on the boat.

Sorenson's eyes were lifeless, as if they were no longer his. Fish eyes.

He sobbed, though no tears fell. Maybe he was a man who could not cry. I thought, in their private moments all men cry. I guessed Sorensen had used up his tears between that boat and this tape.

'Oh, God. God, help me,' he pleaded.

Was he asking for help or forgiveness?

'Casas didn't come out until we were midstream,' he said. 'The crew, there were three of them, though they spoke practically no English, attended to us. Offered us drinks. Jack had a double whisky, downed it, had another. I had nothing. All the time we could hear voices from the master suite, farther along the boat from the saloon where we sat. It sounded as if Casas was making a call. And then he came out. I don't know where the crew had suddenly gone, presumably to the pilot-house. But immediately Jack saw him, he knew. I saw it in Jack's eyes – he knew Casas.'

I looked swiftly at Ellen. She was lost in Sorensen's account.

'Jack knew Casas from somewhere else. But I didn't have a chance to find out. I didn't have any chance. Casas was on me before I could react. He struck me. I was out.'

Sorensen's breath came harder now, sweat poured from his drawn face on the screen, his fingers tore at the corner of the tabloid.

'I woke up bound. My head throbbed.'

He leaned his head forward so that we could now see the top of his scalp. There was an ugly swelling. It appeared consistent with his story.

'I was in a small cabin, a single bedroom. The first thing I

noticed was the smell. I thought that I must be near the galley. I thought someone was burning the food.' He came to a halt, his face screwed up in disgust. 'I was wrong.'

I could see that he wanted to stop, but he pushed himself into continuing. He might never be able to start the story again if he stopped.

'Then I heard the screaming. Muffled screaming. Someone was gagged, but still there was this screaming. We must have been in the middle of the river, and classical music – some hellish fucking orchestra – was playing, but still I could hear. I could hear Jack.'

He held up his raw, serrated wrists for the camera to see.

'I pulled on the binding till my wrists were bleeding, finally got enough slack. I slipped out, kicked down the door. Casas was so surprised he dropped the . . . the torch. The blowtorch. The carpets went up in flames, the curtains, the sofa was just fire. And there was Jack. Oh, God.' He closed his eyes tight, seeing, not wanting to see any more. 'Jesus Christ, what he had done to Jack.'

Now tears ran down Sorensen's cheeks. 'I'm not coming in. I'm not bloody coming in, do you all fucking hear?' he shouted at the camera. 'Nowhere's safe from a man like Casas, so don't give me all that witness protection shit.'

There was banging on the door to his right. He lunged across the screen, pulled a gun from beneath the bed. He lashed out at the camera with his left fist; it toppled from the perch upon which he had placed it.

A frightening blur of colours. The camera struck the floor. I saw Sorensen's bare feet. He kicked at the camera. It stopped recording.

There was a cut.

When the picture resolved itself, Sorensen was less frenetic, but the horror was still lodged in his eyes. He had given up hope. The worst sin of all, Father McCory told us – despair.

I tried to gauge how long had passed. He had taken time to wipe the sweat off his face. The gun was on the pillow behind

him. It was a Stig .44-calibre, eastern European, customised. Not standard issue. I'd heard a rumour a Stig could fire full-metal jackets containing lethal shot suspended in liquid. It was highly dangerous. It was highly illegal. Such a gun was the stuff of locker-room legend in gun clubs. Their sick-joke name was vampire-stoppers. Sorensen was out of control.

His hollow eyes stared into the camera. 'I can't stop him. He's got to be stopped. You've got to stop him.'

He grabbed the sides of the camera with his gashed wrists. 'Casas grinned at me. There was blood on his teeth. There was fucking blood on his teeth. It had to be Jack's blood.'

The tape cut out.

When I looked at Ellen, she was blinking slowly, as if trying to rouse herself from the nightmare that had surrounded both of us.

When the custody sergeant let me in, Santos was pacing around his cell, impatient.

'They've heard from the missing man,' I said. I summarised what Sorensen had said on the tape.

Santos regarded me with a look somewhere between amusement and surprise. 'No Beethoven sonatas today?' he said. It took me a fraction of a second to understand his reference to the radio, but I remembered before he added, 'Our eavesdropping friends.'

I wasn't concerned with concealing our words with a wall of noise. I was just going to tell him what the police already knew.

'They're coming for you in a second,' I told him.

'Didn't I tell you there was another man?'

I had no intention of acknowledging one little truth in the tapestry he had spun us all. 'We don't have much time,' I told him. 'I want to tell you what happens next.'

'I've been thinking a lot about our families. Yours and mine. I never realised how much I loved my wife until I lost her. Do you think your father feels the same?'

'They're going to charge you with—'

'I never cheated on her once. I had sex with other women, of course, but never even began to think I could ever love anyone else.'

I heard people approaching in the corridor outside.

'If you are my attorney, you must act on my instructions. True?'

'Within reason.'

'Then my instruction to you is simple. I don't want you to visit the boat. It will just confuse you. I need you to act on what I'm telling you. Do you understand?'

The key was in the cell door again. Ellen and the jailers appeared. But Santos's focus was upon me.

'Mr Kilkenny, is that within reason?'

Later, we stood in front of the custody sergeant's desk in the maximum-security area below the streets of the capital. Ellen and Leybourne, Santos and me. The sergeant read out the charge from the sheet. I could see that the ink was still wet. His Biro was malfunctioning and the thick globules of black ink shone like little bugs on the paper in the artificial light.

'Sebastian Santos,' he said. 'Also known as Casas. You are charged in that within the dates specified you did wilfully murder one Jack Telfer, an officer of the law, within the jurisdiction of the Central Criminal Court. You have the right to remain silent, but it may harm your defence if you do not mention when questioned any matter that you may later rely upon in court.' He looked up at Santos. 'Do you have any reply?'

Santos stood in his paper forensic suit. His eyes twitched towards me. I was not going to humour him.

'Any reply?' the sergeant repeated.

Santos began slowly, almost chewing each of the syllables. 'I read that they used to tie felons to the wharf posts of the Thames at low tide. And they wouldn't move the body until three tides

had passed over. The Grace of the Thames, they called it. It was not, I think, a graceful way to die.'

'Do you have any reply to the charge?' Ellen said.

'There are no graceful ways to die. But maybe there are such ways to live. And I will not dignify this charge with a reply, save for this. The lie that goes the longest way is the one closest to the truth.'

'What the hell does that mean?' Leybourne asked.

'Your Mr Sorensen clearly knows that principle. There was a struggle on the boat. But I was attacked first and knocked unconscious. I haven't seen the video yet, but it might be interesting to compare Mr Sorensen's injuries to mine. I don't know what happened to Mr Telfer. Perhaps you should ask Mr Sorensen. If you can.'

'So you deny the charge?' Ellen asked.

'If you require details of my defence, Miss Ross, speak to my attorney,' Santos said.

'I would like some details,' Leybourne said. 'I'd like counsel to tell me how he sleeps at night defending a man who launders the blood money of drug-dealing cartels.'

'I'm doing my job,' I said. 'Like you.'

Leybourne nodded. 'Like me? Just like me? You haven't a fucking clue what my job is. I wish you bloody defence briefs had to stay – just for twenty-four solid hours – with someone hospitalised because of drugs, and then maybe, just maybe, you'd have the fucking right to tell me what my job is like.'

# Chapter Eighteen

By the time I returned to Cable Street, it was getting dark. A light fog had settled above the river, as if the Thames were a long and winding bath full of dry ice. I entered my office; so absorbed had I become in the Santos case that I had almost forgotten that I had a legal practice before it came along. Train sat with his feet on my desk, tape recorder running, playing the police interview from another case and checking it off against the transcript.

'You've got to agree the Atkins transcript by tomorrow,' he said.

'Yes,' I said quietly.

'The computer company called. I got them to agree a month's extension, but we've got to pay them something more on account or they're going to repossess.'

'How did you persuade them?'

Train appeared pleased with his advocacy. 'Told them we've hooked the Boat of Horrors. Guy at the other end saw it on the news. OK, you've got a stay of execution, he said, which is more than your client's going to get.'

He laughed. I looked around the office, at what I was working to pay for. Ruth had bought most of the plants, heavily scented white winter jasmine, and they thrived because Train kept the central heating up full blast to prevent his knee from

seizing up. The computers, filing cabinets, desks, even the lights, were all on HP or rented.

'Listen, we also got a call from some scum-bag reporter,' Train told me. 'Says the case is coming to court tomorrow.'

'God, the station's leaking all over the place.'

'Wants to offer you a deal. Exclusive inside story and all that. This case is going to be that big?'

I nodded, feeling exhausted.

We sat at the kitchen table over plates of rice and meat. The warm and sweet smell of the tamarind filled the room. Ruth with the men, just as she had been when we were growing up, except for this meal Train had taken Dad's place. Ruth put on a pedestal she never asked for, by all of us. As objectively as I could, I summarised what had happened. The interview, the arrival of the tape. Its contents. Frankie watched without asking questions, and I knew that he was absorbing everything.

I was tired and frustrated and Santos's words coiled around me more and more tightly. 'Look, I saw that video. Santos is guilty, full stop. How did you have anything to do with a man like that?'

'He befriended me in New York, OK? I needed a friend, and he was one.'

'Were you on the boat?'

'You need to ask me that?'

'Come on, David,' Ruth said.

'Don't come to his rescue. You always come to his rescue.'

'Don't use me as a pawn in this,' she said.

'No one *ever* uses you,' I responded. Where the words came from, I don't know.

'Hey, Davey, that's Ruth you're talking to,' Train said.

'Excuse me,' Ruth interjected quietly. She got up and left the kitchen. 'I'd better check on the bar.'

When she had closed the door on us, Frankie said, 'See what you've done?'

'I've done?' I repeated in disbelief.

'Yeah, you,' he said. 'Just like you are with Dad. Every single bloody thing has to be a war.'

'Were you on that boat?'

'You would just love it if I was, wouldn't you?' He stared hard into my face, his eyes scarily still. He paused, made me sweat. 'No,' he said finally.

'So why do you want me to do the case?' I asked in little more than a whisper.

'Because I hired the boat. Because I was Santos's point of contact with the bank. Because I got involved in his finances. He's cleverer than you could possibly imagine. There's no limit to what he could blame on me. I just thought if you were in his corner, then . . .' He lowered his head so that we were eye to eye, no bullshit, so that I could see whether he was lying. 'Then I thought you'd also be in mine. They could come for me any day. They've hauled me in here and in New York. I've got the bruises to prove it, haven't I? They could finger me for anything. But I did nothing wrong. Except for wanting a friend.'

He left the kitchen. Train stood with his back against the fridge, watching me.

'Don't,' I said.

'I ain't saying a thing,' he replied.

'OK, come on. Say what you want. I think that look on your face is even worse.'

'Here are the people who love you most in the world and you end up bawling them out. How does that go down? I've seen you be all nice and polite to murderers and armed robbers, and here you go screaming at your family.'

'I don't know why. It's just families. Engines of torture, Santos calls them.'

'Great. You're quoting a psycho in your defence.'

We laughed, relieving the tension. Together we started clearing up, and then I remembered something else Santos had said, his instructions to me about not visiting the boat.

If he didn't want me to go, I wanted to know why not. If it was a double-bluff, then he was going to get his wish. I phoned Ellen. It took two attempts for me to be put through, the switchboard cutting me off the first time. When she answered, she said, 'OK, you've got two minutes, Dolphin Man.'

'What happened to Santos in the US?' There was silence down the line. 'Elles, I know you, the background work you'll be doing. You are the best cop I know.'

'Was,' she replied.

She waited, put her hand over the receiver at her end, and I could hear her say a muffled goodnight to someone there. She waited some more. When she spoke, she whispered down the phone. 'They buried him,' she said.

I recognised the covert op's slang, but I had to be sure. 'Faked his death?'

'The Dakota Fall, that's what they call it. Nice scam. Faking a shooting in public, on the courtroom steps. In a case that's fictitious on an indictment that never existed. From that you'll know what he was to the authorities.'

'He must have been a pretty high-grade informer.'

'So what if he's been informing, he's also murdered a cop. Well, Jack Telfer.'

'I thought you liked Jack the Lad?'

She was silent.

'I need to go on the yacht.'

'No way.'

'It's the scene of the alleged crime, the *locus in quo*, and it's material evidence. Need I go on?' She was silent at the other end. 'Look, I know this is going to be a pain for you to arrange. But tomorrow, after Santos is remanded, I'm going to go on that boat.'

When I ended the call, Train was looking right at me. 'Now why are you going to the boat?' he asked.

'Because Santos doesn't want us to go. He says it will confuse things.'

'Which means?'

'We've got no choice.'

Night Train Nelson shook his head. 'This case is so fucked up.'

When Frankie was asleep, I went into the back of my office where I kept the heavy-bag and speedball. I stripped to the waist and began warming up slowly, throwing the odd punch, stretching the muscles, but it was no use. I kept thinking about Ruth. As I arrived at the bar, she stopped mopping to let me in.

'Your dad went to his poker game,' she said.

'I don't want to speak to him.'

'OK, goodbye,' she said, and she tried to shut the door.

I jammed my foot in it. 'Hey, come on.'

'There must be some mistake. You can't want to talk to me. I'm the one who only ever uses people.'

'Look, I'm an idiot, OK? What do you want me to say?'

'Say it again.'

'I am a fucking idjut, Mistress Ruth. Now pretty please can I come the fuck in?'

'Why didn't you ask?'

We stood together inside, neither knowing what to say. The smell of the stew special lingered in the air, as ingrained in Kilkenny's as the smoke and alcohol. Two cues were left on the pool table; the juke-box was switched off.

'I don't know why I said it. The case is getting to me,' I said.

'Then tell me about it. Talk to me. I know you're trying to shield me from the bad things, but how can I understand what you're going through unless we talk? We've got to stop making assumptions about each other.'

'I agree.'

'And if we are to have any kind of relationship in future, I want to be wooed.'

'Wooed?'

'Yes, David. Some serious wooing has to happen. I want to go on dates like proper couples. Surprise dates. Mysterious, exciting dates, not just time snatched together when no one is looking. I want you to want me not because of everything you know about me, but because of what you don't. The woman I am and the girl you grew up with are two different people.'

'I know that.'

'Really? What turns me on? Not just sexually. What about life?' When I was silent, she said, 'OK, I admit I don't know how long it's going to be before we can go public, but can't we try to do things together in the meantime?'

'So where do you want to go on this date?'

'I want to see what you do.'

'What I do?'

'Yes, something. I don't know what exactly. I want to see what your life is like when you're off being David for the Defence.'

I paused, thought about it for a moment. 'You might not like it,' I replied.

'Why not?'

'Because I'm defending Santos, remember.'

# Chapter Nineteen

The rain fell hard; it scrubbed the pavements of the capital, splashing up over the rims of shoes, making socks damp and uncomfortable. Reporters and court hangers-on attracted by the circus shook out their coats, umbrellas dripped, and the huge cast-iron fittings of the old court building burned like ship lights on a masthead. The courtroom smelled of furniture polish and carpet cleaner, but it was too worn with years of the city's crimes for the cleaning to make much difference, though it retained an unmistakable air of faded splendour.

The dock was an elaborate cast-iron cage in the centre of the room, with the advocates' rows in front of it. Journalists crammed into the remaining space in the well of the room, and the public fought for places in the gallery high above the court. I saw Ellen in an understated trouser suit to my right. I had not wasted my time going down into the cell area since Santos had refused to see me.

'DI Ross,' I said.

'Mr Kilkenny.' Ellen replied. 'This is Susan Mottram, prosecuting.'

The other woman smiled without getting up from the thick file of papers in front of her. She had a black Cleopatra haircut, straight at the sides, straight fringe across her forehead. It was so black I thought it must be dyed. It was unusual for the Crown

Prosecution Service to instruct a barrister for so perfunctory a hearing. But I was sure she was not CPS.

'Counsel?' I asked.

'TC,' she replied.

Treasury Counsel. The cream of the crop as far as prosecutors at the Bar are concerned. The CPS had wheeled in a big gun from the start.

'You did the Katherine Calderwood inquest, didn't you?' Mottram asked.

'Yes.'

'Ran circles around the police there. I'm going to have to watch you like a hawk.' She pulled out what I could see was the police case summary. Mostly it was typed. I glimpsed an addendum. It was in Ellen's handwriting.

'When can I have some proper disclosure?' I asked.

'I thought DI Ross has been more than generous with you,' Mottram said, her smile fading for the first time.

'She has. Prior to charge. Now it's for real,' I replied.

'You can read the case summary.'

I turned to Ellen. 'Is there anything I don't already know?'

'Nothing else that you're entitled to know.'

'I just thought there might be an addendum, Elles,' I said. 'You know, some last-minute, *handwritten* evidence.'

Ellen whispered in Mottram's ear, and the TC nodded.

'I don't want anything to do with my client's informing mentioned in open court,' I said.

Mottram's face became fixed in what I would come to know as her trial mask. 'Don't take me for an amateur,' she said.

Ellen seemed on edge; she rubbed the corners of two sheets of paper in her hand and was about to say something to me when she stopped herself.

'If you won't ask him about it, I will,' Mottram said.

'What's going on, Elles?' I asked.

Mottram took the papers from Ellen and laid them out side by side. 'You know nothing about this, I hope.'

The sheets were images that had been downloaded from the Internet.

'Bootleg copies of the PM photos,' Mottram said. 'Scanned into somebody's computer. Pretty amateur job, but better than some of the stuff posted on the Net.'

Jack Telfer's tortured body, now in a strange kind of virtual limbo – floating around cyberspace.

'They're on a website. A paysite, actually – 19.95 dollars to get in,' Mottram said. 'They've already had nearly ten thousand visitors according to the Web counter.'

At the bottom of the sheet was the domain address: *www.boat-of-horrors.com*.

'I told them it wasn't you,' Ellen said; her eyes didn't leave mine as she spoke.

'Thanks,' I replied.

'And you just accept that?' Mottram asked her.

'Yes,' she said.

'Well, the circulation was very limited. We'll track down the culprit. God, this case is enough of a circus as it is.'

'Anything known?' I asked about Santos's previous convictions.

'Nothing's turned up on the PNC,' Mottram said. 'No CRO number. Can you believe, there's even a chatroom on the website?'

I glanced at Ellen, and then followed her eyes to the dock. Sebastian Santos had entered court.

He wore an ill-fitting brown suit I would never see him in again. I assumed it was one of the many that are kept for detainees whose clothes were retained for forensics. There were whisperings around court, and I wondered if they were motivated by Santos's angelic features, the white hair and black eyebrows, or by the facial injuries. He looked like a frightened schoolboy. I pushed through the reporters, who were now all standing and gawking at him. From the public gallery, a tramp shouted out, 'You bloody murderer.'

This brought several more catcalls and abusive threats.

I arrived at Santos's side. Through the grille on the front of the dock, his eyes were wide and full of fear. He tried to smile.

'I see my fan club is in town,' he said.

'Why didn't you want to see me?' I asked.

'They told me I wasn't allowed to see you.'

In that moment, we both realised that we had been deceived. The little subterfuges of jailer staff armed with tabloid front pages, little obstacles thrown in the path of an unpopular defendant, gestures to say that we did our bit to get the bastard.

He glanced at the two jailers behind him, and adjusted his voice so that in the din of the courtroom they would not hear. 'I'm sorry for how I behaved in the police station.'

I nodded, did not reply.

'They showed me the video,' he said. 'Are you convinced?'

Another man's voice screamed out, 'Murderer.'

'There's something wrong with it,' I said to him.

Train cut a swathe through the reporters as he approached us. He reached the dock, looked at Santos, but not for too long, then directed his words to me. 'The magistrate's going to come in,' he said.

'This is my assistant, Troy Nelson,' I told Santos.

He looked Train up and down, inspected the suit. 'We seem to have the same tailor,' he said.

Train stared Santos down, as if this were the square-up in the seconds before the boxing match began. 'How's your cell?'

Santos smiled a little. 'They play me Beethoven sonatas,' he said.

The usher tapped me on the arm, reminding me of the magistrate's imminent presence. The court settled into seats and Train and I hurried back to the front.

'What the fuck's Beethoven to do with anything?' Train asked.

A door opened to the right of the courtroom and the usher cried out, 'Court rise.'

Everyone stood.

He came in all bones and angles, a tall skeleton with a drum-tight covering of skin, excess flesh purged, prematurely grey hair tamed into a severe side parting, peering over his half-moon metal-framed glasses. Martin Jarrow styled himself as being a no-nonsense Northerner who had come south with evident regret owing to some unclear family tragedy. Being a stipendiary magistrate, a paid professional as opposed to a lay Justice of the Peace, he knew the ropes in court. He tolerated no lawyer's histrionics. He had been a stone-hearted prosecutor in the North before life had dragged him south. He sat silently and peered from the Bench with ferret eyes.

'Are you Sebastian Santos?' the clerk asked in a faltering voice, unnerved by the packed courtroom.

Santos looked at me. He said nothing.

'Are you Sebastian Santos?' the clerk repeated.

Still Santos was silent.

A murmur rose around court.

'*Silence!*' Jarrow shouted. He leaned forward on the bench, palms pressed together as if he were praying. 'You must identify yourself for the court record.'

Santos refused to speak, defiant and calm.

To my right Mottram quickly rose. 'Sir, he's mute of malice. He has already been extensively interviewed by the police.'

'Mute of malice doesn't apply,' I countered immediately. 'We're not entering a plea.'

I hadn't consciously thought it. With experience such ideas sometimes come. My riposte stopped Mottram for the time being.

Jarrow leaned back in his winged chair. He looked towards the court ceiling for inspiration. The antique lights burned, the pendulum of the massive clock beat time, stoking the tension.

'This man is charged with murder,' Jarrow finally said. 'Is there any application for bail?'

'Not at *this* stage,' I said.

There were the whisperings and scribblings around court that I had known my last comment would cause. I felt a buzz, easing myself into the choreography of the case.

'Remand in custody for seven days,' Jarrow said. 'And next time I want proper evidence of this man's identity. Take him down.'

Jarrow jolted upward, though his grey hair did not move. He spun around and disappeared from court. Around me reporters dashed out to begin filing their stories. A woman dressed entirely in black, with hollow eyes and a drawn face, now came to Ellen's side. Ellen briefly took her hand, whispered something I could not hear; the woman left.

'Astrid Sorensen, Bill Sorensen's wife,' Ellen told me.

'I thought Sorensen was still meant to be alive,' I said, referring to her black attire.

'Have some respect.'

I hurried to the dock before the jailers could remove Santos. 'We'll talk about all this later,' I said. 'I can't come down to see you now.'

'Why not?' he asked.

'I'm going to see the boat,' I said.

'Despite my instructions?'

'Because of them. Sack me if you want.'

He turned slowly, and was about to go downstairs when he looked at me and smiled. 'I warned you,' he said.

When we got out into the carpark which backed on to the old flower market, I was waylaid by a man with hooded eyes. He appeared to find it difficult to exist in the light of day, even a dark, rainy day. It was Rats. He wore an old LA Raiders baseball cap, black with the pirate skull-and-crossbones insignia. He kept his hands stuffed down deep in his combat trousers.

'Yo, counsel,' he said. 'How's it hanging?'

Train turned to me and spoke in a pukka English accent. 'Methinks we have a brother before us.'

'Bit early for you, Rats,' I said.

'Nah, late,' he said. 'Party went on, like.'

'So what have you got?'

His eyes darted around; he wanted to ensure that we were alone in the carpark. Then he glanced with his filmy pupils at Train. 'He's kosher?'

'He assisted on your last scuffle with the courts,' I said.

'Ungrateful sonofa,' Train grumbled.

'Nah, peace. Forgot, cuz,' Rats said.

I feared for a moment that Train would soon be on a serious GBH charge. Forgetting Night Train Nelson sitting in on your court case was a little like forgetting a rhinoceros in your vegetable patch.

'You asked me if I could get you the PM photos,' I said.

'I don't remember that,' Rats replied. 'But I must admit those photos of poor Detective Telfer were pretty hot.'

'You set up the website.'

'As you once taught me, counsel: I can't confirm or deny that,' he said, smirking. 'Sorry I can't be more helpful.'

Train grabbed Rats's fleece top and virtually pulled him off the ground. 'Confirm or deny this,' he said, his face inches from the terrified grass.

'OK, OK, I'm just cybersquatting. Boat of Horrors is not my site. Wish it was. I was too late.'

'What the fuck're you saying?' Train asked.

I had heard the phrase; in fact my e-mail account had been sent several spams – unsolicited junk mail – a few months previously, offering huge profits in the domain name market.

'What site have you registered, then?' I asked.

'I squattin' Santos'.'

I imagined it: *www.sebastian-santos.com*.

Now owned by Rats for the registration fee of seventy dollars.

'This case's going to be huge. Santos could become a brand.

The site might be worth thousands. He can buy it off me when he gets out.'

'Or maybe he'll come visiting you with a blowtorch,' Train said, casting him aside.

'Hey, it's not illegal what I'm doing. You've got to speculate to accumulate.'

'You know, Jeremy,' I said, 'I never thought I'd say this but I almost preferred it when you were just a pusher. Now what have you got on the case?'

'There was something in the chatroom. Rumours about Telfer. You know, some of the open prisons allow cons to use the Internet. I checked out the info with a source. This source had the dirt on Big Bad Bill Sorensen, too.'

'What can you tell me about Sorensen?' I asked.

'He's under this big filthy cloud,' Rats replied. 'Perjury, conspiracy to pervert, obstruction of justice. He's not exactly officer of the year.'

'How was he still operational?' I asked.

'Allegations made by convicted criminals. Money launderers doing bird. No one believes criminals. We're a much-discriminated-against minority.'

'Anything else?' I asked.

'I only owed you two K,' he said.

I nodded. 'We're even,' I told him.

He didn't wait for thank-yous; his debt was paid.

I shouted after him, 'Try not to break the laws of the land, Jeremy.'

He paused in mid-stride, no doubt cursed me to himself, then disappeared.

Train tugged at the knot of his tie and popped his top button. 'Where the hell does that leave us?'

'I'm working on it. Can you make some calls, see what people are saying about Santos in the States?'

'Might take a while, but I've still got contacts. Old-fashioned contacts, not computer geeks.'

A different picture was emerging, not one that I necessarily wanted to see. A bent cop in the equation was akin to dropping a magnet in front of a compass. The needle spins, you veer off the settled course, and when the needle-tip finally points, it points to the new centre of attraction. To the bent cop.

I dialled on my mobile and waited until Ruth picked up. 'Ready for what we discussed?' I said.

'Yes,' she said.

'And you really want to do it?'

'Where are we going, David?'

'We're going to see the boat.'

# Chapter Twenty

The marina was one of those that had been resurrected from the old dockyards in the eighties, with state-of-the-art condominiums rising around it. Each condo floor was narrower than the one below, creating laddered balconies and an overall effect of Aztec temples – although now there was a rash of For Sale signs. Ruth joined us at the quay-master's hut as before us a flotilla of craft bobbed on the tide; the *Corinth* was at the very end of the wharf.

'Are you sure you can get me on board?' she asked.

Train coughed loudly. 'Do I understand that you want to see a murder scene?'

'I wanted to see what you boys get up to,' she said.

We walked past a couple of police cars; one had its door open and the staccato sound of a police channel came from the radio. Leybourne stood near by, distracted, not hearing the radio, which was asking for him to check in. Instead, he waited with a small group of officers – it included Ellen.

'These are my assistants,' I told him.

'Get their names,' Leybourne said to a uniform.

'Troy Nelson, Ruth Fernandes,' I said.

'Oh, this is Ruth?' Ellen asked. 'Really keeping it in the family, Killer.'

'They can't go in alone,' Leybourne said to her.

'I'm not going to be watched,' I responded.

Ellen sighed and looked at Leybourne. 'We can trust him.'

Leybourne remained unconvinced, but he was unwilling to make a fight of it and walked towards the police cars.

'We *can* trust you, Dave?' she asked.

'Look, if I pinch the anchor, you can nick me. Promise.'

'I don't know why I let you get away with it,' she said. 'But one of the uniforms hangs around in the background.'

'No, the woodentop stays on deck.'

'Deal,' she said.

She walked ahead of us and spoke to the first of the uniforms, who began cutting away the tape that cordoned off the rear deck. She gestured us forward. I carried the specs of the identical sister vessel, the *Ithaca*, which we'd downloaded from the Internet site of Alpha Marine, Fort Lauderdale, the yacht's constructors.

'Bye, Ruth,' Ellen said as she left.

When we were alone, Ruth asked, 'Why did she call you Killer?'

'Just an old nickname,' I said, which was kind of true.

'She's older than me, isn't she?' Ruth said, immediately adding, 'God, did that sound bitchy?'

Train laughed. 'Darling, you want to hear how us boys talk about each other.'

The gangway from the quayside was a rope bridge, and it strained behind me under Train's weight as he stepped over the water. There was a steep drop on the other side of the bridge, down to the rear deck, so I offered Train my hand to ease the impact on his bad knee. He took it in silence, and neither of us commented on the fact that I was obliged to help a one-time title contender as if he were twice his actual age and burdened with a Zimmer frame.

Instead, he filled the awkward silence with words. 'You know, when I was a kid, we'd see boats like this cruising up the East River. Doing the round Manhattan Island thing. You could hear the party musak, could see the babes with their string

bikinis. Man, we were jealous. Often talked about how you could rip one of them off.'

'You had such an ideal childhood,' I said to him.

'Didn't we all?' Ruth said.

Train looked around the rear deck as the wind off the river picked up and the yacht's specs flapped in my hand. 'Don't know what the hell we're looking for anyhow.'

'Anything that doesn't fit,' I said. 'We've been given two versions of what happened in here. Sorensen claims Santos attacked them. Santos the opposite. Neither gives a proper motive for the attack. Neither explains why Telfer died. There must be something everyone's missing.'

We oriented ourselves, using the blueprints of the yacht. The magnificent craft was like a diving bird, frozen in motion, the prow its beak, the black streaks of reflective glass its shiny eyes, the angled radar tower at the very top some fantastic white plume. On this, several seagulls perched. The breeze dropped fractionally, and I noticed something else. The smell of burning.

'I say we start on the outside and work our way in,' I said. 'Agreed?'

'You're paying the cheques,' Train said.

I switched on my hand-held recorder. When viewing the scene of a crime, I always use a tape. It frees me from constant note-taking and allows me to get a real sense of the *locus in quo* – the place where it happened. We moved along the perimeter of the vessel, the rear deck, the narrow 'walkarounds', to the foredeck.

'"Welcome to the palace of your floating dreams,"' I read. '"The true descendant of the most gracious craft that have graced the legendary waterways of history."'

'Think it's a babe magnet?' Train asked.

'No, Train, I'm sure most women would prefer the Woolwich ferry,' I said.

'Man, first million I get, I'm buying one of these.'

'Dream on. "Competitively priced in the upper superyacht

niche, a mere $151 million will buy you the New Generation Kevlar laminate, moulded fibreglass vessel of your dreams. The 49-metre, 160 foot *Ithaca*, like her sister the *Corinth*, has a displacement of 519 tonnes, and a low centre of gravity for comfort and ease of ride."'

Ruth looked at me. 'Think your brother was on board?'

'He's never told me. Said anything to you?'

She shook her head.

I continued. '"With interiors by Gianfranco Zinetti, and extensive communications and entertainment systems, she is powered by two Heine diesels with catalytic converters for environmentally sensitive exhaust."'

'How fast does this baby move?'

I scanned down the specs. We stood on the foredeck, looked up at the front of the pilot-house, and the reflective glass of the main saloon stared at us like two huge implacable eyes. 'Max of 18 knots, cruising at 16.3.'

'What is a superyacht anyway?' Ruth asked.

'Hang on, there's a footnote.' I skipped to the bottom of the page and read the small print next to an asterisk. '"Superyachts are commonly defined as the new generation of luxury craft with global cruising capacity and a length in excess of 80 feet."' I gazed up at the front of the various decks, each expertly recessed, gliding away from the eye smoothly. 'See the pilot house at the top? The windows are near vertical for reduction of glare and heat.'

'I always insist on that,' Train said.

'It's a must these days,' Ruth agreed.

We edged back around the port walkarounds, on the side of the yacht that was obscured from the quayside.

'Davey,' Train said, 'I think I'm in love. God, I can see why boats are women.'

I looked at the specs. 'They've only got the latest voice-activated digital entry systems.'

Train seemed impressed.

'Just say "Open",' I told him.

'No?'

'Go on, I'll let you.'

Train stood in front of the doors, took a deep breath as if he were about to clean-and-jerk three hundred pounds. With a flourish of his arms, he bellowed, 'Open.' Then his face screwed up as absolutely nothing happened.

I simply pulled the door open, trying not to laugh. 'I must've read that wrong,' I said.

'You are a dead man,' he told me.

I stepped into the cabin and was instantly aware of high, sharp smells.

'What's that?' Ruth asked.

'Forensic chemicals,' I said.

'Hasn't got rid of the smell of burning,' Train pointed out, taking out a handkerchief.

In those first few moments inside, I tried to remove from my mind the images of the ugly charcoal claws up the walls, the puffs of black-grey on the ceiling, and I imagined the main luxury saloon as it had been before all the violence; this was a part of my brother's world and not mine.

The cabin was a surprisingly large forty feet long, and bright, since the black windows were one-way reflective and the front and rear walls were floor-to-ceiling sheets of glass. There was the peaceful ambience of an expensive Chelsea mews, not very different to Frankie's first London pad. The detailing of the woods was exquisite, highly polished burl panels of walnut and cherry. There were artistic inlays of darker teaks and Space Age gold latches on cabinets. The thick carpet was extravagant and a wholly impractical snow white, with deep curved seating around the walls and marble coffee tables and antique desks. There were video systems, satellite television equipment, state-of-the-art hi-fi and a wall of videos, DVDs, CDs and cassette tapes. I could imagine Frankie at home in such a place as if it were his birthright, which was of course very far from the truth.

Train stood in the doorway, his back foot still out on the deck.

'Santos must have crawled out that way,' I said.

He backed away, disgusted, as if he were standing in the slime left by a huge slug.

I had done several arson trials, had cross-examined forensic scientists who specialised in the morphology of fire. The first thing to do, I knew, was to detect the seat of the blaze. Where it all started. An accidental fire will usually show a clear point of origin, and there will be a 'track' by virtue of which it will be possible to follow the snaking of the oxygen-hungry flames as they consume combustibles. By contrast, deliberate fires frequently have several telltale starting points and several attempts to conceal these original locations.

I glanced around, looking for the nuances of smoke damage. The colour of the smoke also tells its story, burning cloth creating grey-brown, kerosene black, phosphorus white, nitrocellulose reddish yellow. I checked the carpet and quickly identified the patch of greatest devastation, where the fire had burned right through into the wooden timbers below. It was near here that Telfer's body had been found.

In my head I tracked back through the video account given by Bill Sorensen. I made the assumption that he was telling the truth, and consequently that Sebastian Santos was guilty of murder. We had to play it out.

'You can be Santos or Sorensen,' I told Train.

'I ain't playing the psycho,' Train said.

'I'll play Santos,' Ruth said. 'What's he look like?'

'Pretty little fucker,' Train said.

I examined the blueprints again. 'OK, Sorensen said that he and Telfer were in this cabin, given some drinks, relaxing and waiting for Santos. They could hear him talking.'

'Where?'

I went to the end of the saloon and saw the door to the owner's cabin. 'In here?'

'OK. I can buy that,' Train decided.

Ruth entered the owner's cabin, then came back through the door.

I said, 'Santos comes in and Telfer appears to recognise him, or recognise something about him.'

'What?' Train asked.

'You don't find out because Santos immediately attacks you, knocks you out.'

Train winced and sucked a large lung of air noisily through his teeth. 'That I don't buy.'

'Why not?'

'What am I? A moron?'

'No, you're Big Bad Bill Sorensen, an experienced undercover operative.'

'Then it sounds bull.'

'Why?' Ruth asked.

'Because they're undercover,' I said. 'They're going to be suspicious of everything.'

'What's next?' Train asked.

'You wake up and you're in a smaller bedroom, as you call it.' I checked the blueprint and saw steps down to the lower deck. 'Down there, the guest cabins. You get clear of the ropes binding you, come up those steps and pounce on Santos.'

'Without him hearing? Horseshit.'

'Train, my tape's still running.'

'Come on, Davey. This ain't playing out.'

'Maybe Santos is too much into torturing Telfer with the blowtorch?' I suggested.

'Yeah? Where's the torch?' Train responded.

'I know, I know. Look, you and Ruth start fighting. Sorensen manages to escape and jump ship.'

'And leave his colleague with Santos?' Ruth said. 'Why do that?'

'Maybe he knew Telfer was dead. The blowtorch starts the fire on the carpet here,' I said, pointing with my foot to what I

thought to be the seat of the fire. 'Santos is badly injured, knows the ship could go up, crawls to the rear deck.' I gestured through the open doors. 'Fires the flare. Police and fire barges come. Arrest Santos. We have a case.'

Train nodded his head. Thought it through, then said, 'What is this, *The Wizard of Oz*?'

I knew he was right. Something was seriously wrong with Sorensen's account.

'Anyway,' Train said, 'remember that Polaroid of Telfer's body? That kind of torture makes a noise. You *want* it to make a noise, that's part of the . . . fun. Why's no one hearing?'

I looked at the wall of video and cassettes. 'Sorensen says this weird classical music's playing.'

We stood in front of the entertainment centre and looked to see what music could be used to accompany torturing a man to death with a blowtorch. I removed a pen from my inside pocket, jabbed the system on. There was a moan as power surged into it. The tape-to-tape was empty, but there was a CD still in the player. The panel smoothly glided out and there was a shiny disc with a dusting of fingerprint powder on it.

'Ruin the system,' Train said.

'I doubt they'll have got a print. You hold CDs by the rim, don't you?'

I checked the words in the centre of the disc. It was a compilation of classical highlights. 'Looks like Sorensen was telling the truth about that,' I said.

'Mark one up for the good guys,' Train commented.

I glanced up at the stacks of cassette boxes, all of them commercially produced, coming from a variety of record labels, and covering jazz, classical, blues and soul. Moody, easy listening, perfect for the water.

Then I saw one that stood out. I looked at Ruth and realised that she had spotted it as well.

Not that it was of itself particularly unusual. It was hardly something the police would have been looking for.

'What was it Santos said to you?' I asked Train.

'Sonofabitch said we had the same tailor.'

'No, when you asked him how he liked his cell.'

I could see the effort on Train's face as he tried to nail the memory, then the relief and sense of triumph when he had. 'Some shit about Beethoven.'

'Beethoven's sonatas,' I added.

'So?'

'So he's constantly gone on about Beethoven's sonatas. When I went into his cell with a radio, when I came back the next day, when he met you.'

Train now looked at the cassette box. 'Shit,' he said.

We heard the uniform pounding out his watch above us.

'I could be wrong,' I whispered to him. 'It could be nothing.'

'It's the only tape with a home-made label. The police should have seen it,' Ruth said. 'Jesus, David, the writing.'

'Why? What's it got to do with anything? Or maybe they did check it out and it's nothing.'

The narrow end of the box had handwriting on it, spelling out the two words 'Sonatas – Beethoven'.

I jabbed the box at one end with my pen, moved it a fraction out of its slot. 'It hasn't been dusted,' I said.

The footsteps above us came to a stop.

I could feel the breeze blowing in through the open door, chilling the left-hand side of my face, cooling the sweat that now began to drip down it. 'I'm going to take it out,' I whispered.

'Why?' Train whispered back.

'Because it's Francis's writing on the box,' Ruth said.

I put my pen away, wiped my hand, reached for the cassette box – and then tried to cover Ruth when the screaming began.

The air all around us was suddenly alive.

Shadows cut through the air, beating it, flapping all around us. Train crouched with his hands over his face. I felt a sharp pain at the back of my head; the flesh was cut.

'Gulls,' I shouted, waving the yacht specs to scare them off.

Their cawing in that confined space, where awful death had come, became infinitely more frightening. I yanked my jacket from my back, swirled it around my head in the cabin, and just as suddenly the gulls were gone.

There was silence in the cabin. The Beethoven sonatas cassette was still in place.

Train dusted himself off, an act of relief. 'I hate birds,' he said.

Ruth inspected my head. 'You're bleeding.'

'I'll live.'

With the commotion, the uniform had clambered down the outer stairway and was peering into the cabin from the rear deck. 'Don't keep the doors open,' he shouted. 'They can smell the burned flesh.'

I didn't believe him. I'm sure he was just trying to wind us up, but I wanted him out of there. Ruth and I looked at each other, then both looked back at the box. The uniform was again pacing on the sundeck above us, and now that the doors were shut the smell of charring began to build. Train made eyes at me, and I decided that I had to take responsibility for interfering with the scene of crime.

My fingers reached out, felt the cool, clear plastic of the box cover, the sharp angles of its edges. I opened it as carefully as I could, just touching the rims, ensuring I didn't leave any prints or damage any that might be there. Inside was a see-through cassette, one that afforded a clear view of the spools turning as it recorded.

'It's partly wound on,' I told them. I checked that the uniform was still safely above us and decided. 'I'm going to play it.'

I took out my pen again, slipped the end into the teeth of the cassette spool, and lifted it out of the box. I gently pressed the machine shut. My breathing was fast and shallow as I pressed Play, my mind racing through a thousand conflicting possibilities as to what we were about to hear.

But we heard nothing.

Nothing except static.

The hum of the electricity in the machine, the microscopic imperfections on the tape. I used my pen to press Stop, then Rewind, then Play once more. I watched the spools momentarily spin as they took up the slack in the tape, then the voices began.

Two voices.

A man and a woman. Intimate, clandestine, in love, in lust.

We were transfixed, guilty, like voyeurs, hearing things between two people that the rest of the world had no right to know. Still we listened, and by the end of the five-minute recording, I was convinced that someone apart from Sebastian Santos had a compelling motive to kill Jack the Lad Telfer.

We made our way back to Cable Street having called ahead from the car, to ensure Frankie was still there. Train said he was worried about me using the boat's tape-to-tape to make our own recording, but I finally convinced him that it was not technically tampering with evidence. My scene-of-crime commentary tape now had a small but crucial addendum – the five-minute conversation from the Beethoven sonata tape.

Just outside the kitchen door, Ruth told me, 'You love Francis, remember?'

We entered the kitchen, where Dad sat at the old wooden table with Frankie, a large mug of coffee in front of each of them. They seemed happy enough, both of them smiling as during those end-of-term days when Dad would purr over Frankie's straight-As report.

'Your brother's told me everything,' Dad said.

I stood silently, trying yet again to gauge Frankie, looking for the tiny confirmations of trust or betrayal on his face. His wide smile shrouded all his other features. It was his favourite disguise.

'Did you hear? I told Dad.'

'Did you tell him about Beethoven's sonatas?' I asked.

His body froze, as if the blood had suddenly stopped in his veins, and his practised smile cracked. Had he forgotten about the tape, or did he think I was too stupid to find out?

'It's your writing on the tape, Frankie,' I said. '*Your* bloody writing.'

'You boys better get your story straight,' Dad said.

'You shouldn't have done it,' Frankie said. 'Why are you digging it all up?'

'Because you wanted me to do the case.'

'But I don't want you to win it,' he protested.

'Why do you want me to lose it, then?'

'I told you. Santos is mad. He's evil. I can't tell you any more.'

I reached past Dad, grabbed Frankie's jumper, my jumper, tore it out of shape as I pulled him closer to me with all my strength. 'You knew why Telfer was killed,' I said.

'What?' Dad demanded.

I stared hard at Frankie and he looked away. 'You knew.'

'What?' Dad repeated.

'Why Bill Sorensen wanted to kill Jack Telfer,' I said.

# Chapter Twenty-One

As Frankie, Dad and I argued, answering questions with further questions, I noticed that Ruth sat quietly, her hands on her lap, head fractionally tilted as if she were listening to another conversation, one far removed in time from ours. When she spoke, one by one we stopped talking, so that though she never raised her voice, she commanded the attention of the room.

'Remember when I broke the golf trophy?' she said.

At this, the three of us exchanged uneasy looks, while Train appeared confused. He had every right not to understand, because what Ruth alluded to was the only time, to my knowledge, that her father hit her.

When Robert failed to be promoted to sergeant for the third time, and realised that he was unlikely ever to be anything other than PC Fernandes in the British police, he determined, despite Dad's advice, to leave the force. He had seen an advert, one of those small boxes in the back of a newspaper, and was convinced that he could make a small fortune in this job selling the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* door to door. We thought he was really losing it because it was purely commission-based, but Ruth's father clung to his childhood notions of who the British were – the people he'd looked up to all of his life, educated, civilised and thirsting for knowledge. After a month of foot-slogging and doors slammed in his face, he phoned Dad one evening close to

midnight, having missed the last train back to London from God knows where. He was in tears. And he was drunk.

The next day, when he was nursing a brute of a hangover, Ruth put her arms around him to let him know that she was there for him, but he pushed her violently away. She went flying, her head cracking against the table, causing the Colonial Club's matchplay trophy to topple and shatter on the floor. He began to hit her.

'I can't remember a more miserable day with Dad,' Ruth told us in the kitchen. 'But I would give anything . . .' Her voice trailed off and her hand went to her face. She brushed her hair behind her ear. 'Look at you three. Don't you see how lucky you are having each other?'

We remained silent.

She looked at Frankie. 'You should have told your brother about the tape. You should have told me. So what was going on?'

'I recorded it,' he said quietly. 'It was part of my debt to Santos.' He rested his sharp chin on his hands, with his elbows uncomfortably on the table. He'd rolled the sleeves of his jumper right up and the veins bulged on his forearms. 'I owed money. Dangerous amounts of money. I was gambling.'

'Atlantic City?' Train asked.

Frankie shook his head. 'I'm not interested in cards or a spinning ball. I was gambling on the markets.'

'It's the same thing,' I said.

'Shows how much you know,' Frankie replied.

I was aware of Ruth's eyes assessing my response, seeing whether I would set things off again. 'OK, OK, what the hell do I know?' I said.

'No, you're right. It's just the same.' He lowered his head in his hands so that his eyes were fixed on the table. 'God, I was such a bloody idiot. There was so much money – virtual money, money you never see except on a screen. Floating in the ether, disappearing, making and breaking people in a day. It became meaningless. Santos's five hundred million. A derivatives deal

worth 2.6 billion. Currencies attacked, banks collapsing. What I did was minute. But I lost.'

'OK, you couldn't pay the money back. Couldn't you have asked for time?' I said.

'These weren't the kind of clients you give IOUs to.'

Now Dad appeared confused, as another of his certainties crumbled. 'But your bank is legitimate, isn't it? You showed it to me in *Forbes* and *Fortune* and all those magazines.'

'Dad, for every ten legitimate accounts in the financial world, there's probably one illegitimate one. Or maybe for every hundred. And the thing is, you can't usually tell.'

'Come on, you're not that green,' I said.

'Right, you tell me. When one of your criminal clients – sorry, your accused criminal clients – comes to you, do you ask where their money comes from? Or do you just take it, and do your job?'

'That's the criminal law,' I said. 'You expect to deal with criminals. You're in high finance.'

'Now who's green?' Frankie said. 'Look, all I'm saying is that money laundering was *the* crime of the eighties. But it's become the commerce of the nineties. You all think the money markets are about international finance, securing debts, capital investment. Wrong. They are about money. Just that. Money. And laundering is just about the most profitable, the most widespread, the most undetectable way of making money there is. Every year, a trillion dollars. Maybe more. No one really knows. Except that no business is bigger, apart from petroleum perhaps.' He looked at me and his eyes pleaded for understanding. 'I gambled with dormant client accounts. I would make them money, even add the interest for the time of the secret loan, and take a small . . . fee myself. I even gave a percentage of what I made to charity – police charities, Dad. I know it's all upside down, but at least our Catholic upbringing did that.'

Frankie looked to Dad for some hint of consolation or approval, the rewards he had received as of right throughout his

life. Dad was silent and still. I felt terrible for my father. His golden boy was revealing himself as tarnished before his eyes. The Frankie that Dad had believed in was disappearing; the real Frankie, the brother I had always known, flawed and reckless but naively well intentioned deep down, was materialising before him. Throughout my childhood there had been times when I would scream into my pillow until my throat was raw about the unfair way Frankie had conned the world, how he'd got away with some lie or other, usually at my expense. To be totally honest, I'd wished for a day like this. Now it was here. I wished it had never come.

'I'd better check on the bar,' Dad said, so quietly that the words barely made it out of his mouth.

'It can wait,' I said.

'Got to be ready for opening.'

'Open late.'

'What about the customers?'

'There are other bars,' I said.

Did he hate me for forcing him to endure Frankie's fall? I don't know; his eyes gave nothing away. But I hated myself, confused that I was strangely excited by what I was doing. Was this the belated I-told-you-so of a younger brother, a message to the world that I was right about my sibling all along?

Frankie continued, 'Train, these were clients who don't ask questions. Their money grows, they see the bottom line, and they're happy.'

'So what went wrong?' Train asked.

'The world. The bloody world. And my happy, no-questions-asked silent partners were no longer happy and did ask questions and were no longer silent when their bottom line went from black to red. For men like that, it's a matter of respect. They didn't just want the money back. They wanted a piece of me. The cartels don't take prisoners. And they would have got me if it hadn't been for Santos.'

'Tell me about the tape,' I said.

'Isn't that enough for now?' Dad asked me. 'We can carry on later.'

'I've got to know now,' I replied. 'If I'm to protect him, I've got to know now.'

Frankie put his hand on Dad's forearm. It was the first physical contact between them since the truth had begun to come out. I watched this carefully, monitoring how my father would respond. He did not recoil. But nor did he respond. He was numb and bewildered, his feelings retreating so that they would not be scarred any further. I also compared – how could I not compare? – my father's attitude towards Frankie with his response to me, all those years ago when I told him that I was going to go on the record with the corruption inquiry. How he had shouted and cursed and threatened to disown me. For telling the truth. Not for anything shameful I had done, but for telling the truth about the River Division. I tried to reconcile his different reactions to his two sons, but I could not.

'I am a bit tired, Dad,' Frankie said. Not over-egging it, not pushing his luck. He was selling, and I knew it.

'Frankie, you're going to tell me everything now and you're not going to move from that seat,' I said. 'I just can't believe what's going on. My beloved brother here has just confessed – yeah, that's what it is in a court of law – to being involved in money laundering, fraud and Christ knows what else, and all of your are thinking: Oh, poor Frankie. Go and have a lie down and we'll think about how to make it better.'

Frankie stood up. His legs were shaky, but he didn't care. 'That's good. Now we're seeing what you really think.'

I stood too. 'Yeah, we are.'

'Come on, then. Say what you want to say. You're thinking it anyway.'

'You're so clever, everyone's always said how you're the one with the brains. But I think you're a fucking idiot. You took a gamble. You fucked it up. Then you should have played smart.

Gone to the authorities, come to me. But instead you just kept rolling the dice. You kept on gambling.'

'You don't know what you're talking about,' Frankie said.

'Don't I?'

'I didn't keep gambling. I got into this trouble exactly because I refused to gamble any more.'

'The cartels wanted you. You went to Santos. That's gambling.'

'I said they wanted a *piece* of me. The only piece of me I cared about any more.' He looked around at all of us. 'I didn't care what they did to me. But that's not how they work. They don't go after you. They go after your family. They make you watch what they do to your family. You, Dad. And you, Ruth.' He looked at me, shaking his head; it caused tears to drip from his eyes. 'And especially you. You cannot imagine the things that these men do. Or perhaps you can. I wasn't going to let it happen. If I could stop it, I wasn't going to let it happen. If it meant having to sell my soul to Santos, then I would do it. And I would do it all again because I don't know what else I could have done.'

He covered his face with his hands, and Ruth held him from one side and Dad from the other. I stood opposite, alone and wretched. David Kilkenny, the wild younger brother and black sheep once more.

# Chapter Twenty-Two

I found my father in the cobbled alley behind the cellar door, signing for a delivery of mixers. In front of him was a lop sided stack of blue plastic crates full of bottled orange juice, pineapple and tonic water. I watched silently as Dad chatted to the young man making the drop, briefly putting his arm around the kid, an ungainly big-boned youth, the two of them sharing a joke together. Before the boy left, Dad reached into his pocket and palmed him a couple of notes. The truck door slammed and clouds of exhaust billowed behind it in the darkening air. Dad took the top crate on to his chest and started to lumber it to the chute.

'I'll do that,' I called.

He carried the crate right up to me as I stood in the doorway. He kept it balanced against his chest, felt the full weight, but refused to put it down. 'Think I'm past it, eh?' he said.

'Don't be daft.'

'I can still bench-press twenty pounds more than you and don't you forget it.' He leaned back against the outer wall, then began to lift the crate above him. I tried to take hold of it.

'Leave it,' he said under the strain. He lowered it to the ground, pretending not to be out of breath.

'It's not a competition,' I said.

He did not reply. After the claustrophobic heat of the

argument in the kitchen, the chill of the air outside lacerated my cheeks.

'What did you give that kid?' I asked.

'That's Russell Tapper's boy.'

I barely recognised him. 'God, he's grown.'

'Just had a baby. Old Russ is chuffed to bits. His first grandchild.'

The comparison made me feel guilty. Here was one of Dad's friends rejoicing about the birth of a new generation in his family, while the Kilkenny boys were doing what? Robbing their father of his memories.

'You're a soft touch,' I said.

'It was only twenty quid,' he replied.

A van pulled up into the courtyard, a smaller van, more like a police dog-handler's vehicle. It was predominantly white. A uniformed man got out, clipboard in hand. He had a ragged moustache.

'Pride of Kilkenny?' he asked.

'That's us,' I said.

'City electric.' The man nodded back towards the van and another, larger uniformed colleague got out, toolbox in hand. 'Got to cut you off.'

'Don't be ridiculous,' I protested. 'This is a bar.'

'We tried everything else. You won't answer our letters, you don't pay your bills, we have to cut you off.'

Dad looked at me with wide-eyed helplessness, and I immediately knew what had happened. His memory of the minutiae of daily life was receding fast, although there was a curious contradictory process affecting his memory of the past.

'How much is it?' I asked.

The man winced and stroked the offending straggles of hair on his thin upper lip. 'Sorry, you can't pay now. You've had the statutory warnings. We've given you chance after chance.'

'Son?' Dad said, looking at me.

'Come on, guys,' I said. 'I'm willing to pay you whatever is

owed right now. My father is almost a pensioner.' This was, incredible as I found it, almost true. 'He's infirm,' I whispered. Not true. 'He has to sleep with an electric blanket or his presumptive nerve degenerates.' Total bull.

'He should have thought of that before we got the court order,' was the reply.

Compassion had failed. And my experience of the law had taught me that where compassion fails, unashamed violence sometimes succeeds. 'All right,' I said, 'I want you off our property now.'

'The meters remain the property of the Board at all times.'

'I am Mr Kilkenny's son, and also his lawyer,' I said, squaring up to the uniform. 'And I'm promising you now that if you don't leave our property I will use all necessary force to evict you, having given you the reasonable notice required by law. And if you so much as interfere with the supply of this senior citizen then I will sue you. I will sue your children. I will sue the friends of your children. I will sue their dogs. Now get out.'

The moustache gazed at his colleague and shrugged. They got back into the van. 'We'll be back with the police,' he threatened.

'I'll sue the police too,' I called after him.

Dad and I watched as they left, more hastily than they had arrived.

'Thanks,' he said.

'You could have paid the bloody bill, Dad,' I responded.

He scratched the back of his scalp with his fingernail. 'I phoned them. I'm sure I did,' he said, struggling to find his way through his clouded memory. 'They said they'd consider an extension.'

'Did they put it in writing?' the lawyer in me asked.

He shook his head. Lights were coming on above and around us as night spilled into the back streets. Farther down Cable Street, I spotted a woman in a pale pink dressing gown with a baby in her arms, or rather balanced over her shoulder. She

walked around and bobbed, trying to put it to sleep or stop it from crying. I saw that Dad had also noticed this same small scene. I wondered if he was thinking what I was. Neighbours spoke about how shortly after my mother's funeral Conor Kilkenny could be spotted in our first Cable Street flat pacing up and down with me in his arms. Night after night he did the same, utterly alone, like a captain keeping watch on a deserted ship, as this motherless intruder wailed in his arms.

They say he sang me sea shanties through the night, and though I have no hope of remembering any shred of this, I sometimes wonder whether it is because of Dad's singing at this time that the songs of the watermen and lightermen who work the river have such an effect upon me. I cannot hear 'Farewell and Adieu to You Spanish Ladies' without aching for a mother I had never known.

Dad's favourite song was 'My Wild Irish Rose'.

I remember many times in my childhood seeing my father's grief stamped all over his face and wishing I had not been born at all. To his credit, as I grew up he never once blamed me for the loss of the only woman with whom he had found love. But sometimes his silence was worse.

'You wanted me to hear all that about your brother, didn't you?' he said.

'We have to know to help,' I replied.

'You want to help him? Is that what you really think?'

'He wanted me to do the case. I'm doing the wretched case.'

'Whether you win or lose that,' he said, 'you've won this already. You've made your point to me.'

He left me alone with my small, meaningless victory, and not wanting to be alone I went into the bar. I saw Frankie there. Train too. They were taking the chairs off the tables, placing them carefully on the block floor, which was streaked with drying water. Seeing Frankie there in the bar, helping out in a way totally alien to him, I wondered if this was some kind of recognition by him that the old Frankie had gone.

Ruth had finished mopping and was returning to the kitchen. I glanced at the boys, ensured they could not hear what I was about to say.

'I must see you later,' I told her.

She smiled wearily, and I saw the draining effect the argument had wrought on her. She shook her hair out, freeing it from the bun in which she'd tied it, and in the process the odour of the jasmine shampoo she used wafted across to me.

'I had to do it,' I whispered.

She briefly took my hand and I felt the wetness from the mopping. 'No one said families were easy.'

'Come round to mine after closing?' I asked.

'I'll try,' she said.

'What did you think of our date?'

'Different. But next time? No seagulls.'

'Right.'

Train joined Ruth in the kitchen, leaving Frankie and me alone.

'I know I'm not exactly in your good books,' he said, 'but I need you to help me out on something.'

'Depends what it is.'

'It's Ruth's night off tonight and she says she's got no plans. I thought you could go for a drink, I don't know, something to eat.'

'Why?'

'Use your detective skills. I think she's been seeing someone else. I wouldn't be surprised, she's beautiful and intelligent, so whoever he is, he must have good taste.'

'He must.'

'Maybe she'll talk to you. She's always talked more to you. I know you've probably got stuff of your own to do, but just once, will you?'

I desperately wanted to tell him: I'm in love with her. I'm the man she's been seeing, and if I have it my way she'll be seeing me from now on. You ended it with her; that means I've done

nothing wrong. That's what I wanted to say – but why then did I feel as if I was betraying him?

'Please, Davey?'

'OK.'

He hugged me. 'What would I do without you?'

I didn't reply because his mobile began to ring; he moved a few steps away before he answered. I watched him, the cellular at his ear as he listened, mouthing a few words I could not distinguish. He let his arm drop to his side. His face blanched, he blinked quickly. Then he held the phone out towards me.

'It's for you,' he said. 'It's Santos.'

I took the phone from him.

'One of the privileges of your remand system,' Santos said. 'Telephone calls.'

'Why did you ring my brother?'

'Because I can remember his number. Why don't you tell me about your visit to the boat?'

'You knew we'd find the tape.'

'What tape? Or perhaps you shouldn't answer that, Mr Kilkenny, given that our call is likely to be bugged. Instead, let me tell you about my visitor.'

'Who was it?'

'Someone who wants to offer me a deal. She came like one of those women who visit serial killers in prison.'

'Ellen Ross?'

'Yes.'

'Anyone with her?'

'Alone.'

'You should never have seen her.'

'I was bored.'

'And she should have contacted me first.'

'She claims things are going to get worse for me. One of the boat crew is going to talk.'

'Which one?'

'The Montenegrin. Do you think she's bluffing?'

'Unlikely. We could use it against her in court.'

'Perhaps they've persuaded him to lie about me.'

'Would he need to lie?'

'Now you sound like our opponents.'

'He's vulnerable,' I said. 'He's an illegal. But he's not still in NCS custody, can't be. They've nothing to hold him on for this long and they'd have to tell me if he'd been charged as an accomplice.'

'So where will he be?'

'They'll have handed him over to Immigration.'

'Miss Ross could access him there?'

'He'll be in a detention centre. I could check their visitors' logs. He's bound to be in Harmondsworth. It's the main place.' Then I remembered that there have to be two sides to every bargain. Ellen must have wanted something from Santos. 'What deal was on offer?'

'She wanted to know about the policeman Telfer. What scheme he was proposing. I suppose they were wondering if it was one he was authorised to propose. What do you think I should do?'

I wondered if Ellen had made a crucial professional misjudgment. This sort of off-the-record horse-trading could be used to Santos's advantage in court. I could use it. An offer undermined their determination to convict him.

'I never advise clients about grassing,' I said. 'Especially when they already are grasses. So I can't help you.'

'Let me speak to your brother, then.'

'No, you speak to me,' I said. 'You don't speak to my brother again.'

'All right,' he said. 'I would like to ask a small favour of you. It's more like an agreement really since I shall offer something in return.'

'What?'

'I want you to light a candle in a Catholic church.'

'Why?'

'There is a prison chapel, I'm told, but candles are forbidden since apparently molten wax can be flicked into the eyes as a prelude to an attack. The ingenuity of the human mind, Mr Kilkenny.'

'What's this all about?'

'Tomorrow is the . . . anniversary, if that is the word, of the death of a young girl I briefly knew.'

'Who was she?'

'Before you ask, I didn't kill her, but her death troubles me still. I'd prefer not to talk about it; this is one crypt I wish not to open. But please do this, if not for me, then for her. Her name was Anna Beth, she was thirteen years old.'

I considered his request and was about to refuse when something about the name and her age worked on me, and I wondered what harm it could possibly do. 'And in return?' I asked.

'I promise I will not phone you or your brother again.'

'I'll light the candle.'

'Thank you.'

I clicked off the mobile, drew up a stool and sat down next to Frankie. As I related both sides of the conversation to him, Train rejoined us. He got the white ball from the pool table and bounced it around the cushions, so that it traced diamond shapes over the felt. Frankie, who knew nothing about this girl, filled us in on a missing piece of his account. The tape.

After Santos had dealt with the cartel, Frankie thought it best to leave New York, and since he was due some untaken leave, he decided to come home. But Santos wasn't finished with him. He wanted something in return. He told Frankie that he was always looking to diversify his operations and had heard that London was easy pickings compared to the saturated and cut-throat American black economy.

It was a question of opportunity. Santos was looking for 'business' opportunities, $500 million business opportunities,

and the men we came to know as Telfer and Sorensen were putting themselves around in London, also purporting to find partners for laundering work. But Santos sensed that something was wrong. He wanted these men checked out first. For this he engaged Frankie.

These types of high-risk investment bank invariably employed a network of 'security consultants', whose job it was, in addition to undertaking official credit checks, to dig deeper into the past and present of potential clients. Frankie used these contacts to keep Telfer under surveillance, but it was difficult – Telfer was a hard man to keep track of.

They managed to bug some of his calls.

'But why use your own tape?' I asked him.

'It was just a copy, one of several I made. I kept one for myself.' He looked at me, trying to judge if I was shocked or impressed. 'How was I to know Santos would leave the tape on the boat? He's not that stupid.'

'Unless he wanted to leave it,' Train put in from the pool table.

'We didn't know who the other woman was at first,' Frankie explained. 'Telfer was obviously having an affair. We didn't know who with.'

I knew. I had seen her as close to as Train now was from me.

'If Sorensen knew about his wife and Telfer,' I said, 'he'd have a motive for killing him.'

Train stopped tossing the cue ball around. 'You're saying Sorensen could have killed Telfer on the boat and then disappeared? Come on, Davey, is that what you really believe?'

'No. What I'm saying, Train, is that we're going to find out.'

'How?' Frankie asked.

I checked my watch, wondering if it was already too late. But I knew this particular office did not keep normal hours, since death was not a nine-to-five process.

'How're we gonna find out?' Train asked.

I dialled Directory Enquiries on Frankie's mobile. 'Central London mortuary,' I said to the operator.

'The morgue?' Train said aghast.

'Tomorrow we're going to look at the body,' I told him.

# Chapter Twenty-Three

The inspection was arranged for the next morning, but I succeeded in getting the post-mortem report faxed over to my office. I went through the pretence of asking Ruth if she wanted to grab a bite to eat that night. Frankie seemed pleased. I felt sick to my stomach.

Ruth waited with me in my office as the fax juddered through the machine.

'I hate this bloody shiny paper,' I said. 'When we win the lottery, I'm buying a plain-paper fax.'

Ruth ripped the current sheet from the machine and began to read the pathological details of Telfer's examination before I took the page from her.

'Scared I won't sleep?' she asked.

'There'll probably be photos. You don't need to see them.'

'Why not?'

'They'll be awful.'

She stroked my forehead. 'And you've got all this . . . awfulness spinning around in there. I didn't tell you, I didn't really get the chance, but I was so proud of you on the boat. How you and Troy try to make sense of it all.'

'Yeah, like we can do that with our lives.'

'Be too easy if we could.'

Further pages of the post-mortem shuddered out of the fax.

'Do you have to read it now?' she asked.

'Why?'

'It's my turn. My date. Your turn to be surprised.'

'We're meant to be going for a meal, so I can interrogate you about the man you might be seeing.'

'What are you going to tell him?'

'That this man loves the girl and loves his brother and feels like a complete and utter bastard. Something like that. I hate what this sneaking around is making me.'

'You're right. But let's think how we tell him.'

We drove west along the A4 to the Hogarth roundabout, until Ruth directed me to an area away from residential property down by the river, opposite the breweries in Barnes. There was a hangar of one hundred covered bays with green carpeting and a field with huge white number signs marking off the yardages from 100 to 250.

'This is where I come,' she said. 'When I want to think. Started coming after the split.'

We found a spot in the driving range's carpark, which was still busy despite the hour, and Ruth went to the pro's shop to get two tokens for the Rangemaster machine. It coughed out one hundred wet golf balls, and we hired a bag of clubs. The staff seemed to know her well. Around us could be heard the whoosh of clubs accelerating through the air, as if choreographed up and down the range; people setting up, swinging, following through, over and over again.

'Why golf?' I asked.

'Dad used to caddy at the Colonial Club when he was a boy.'

'So it runs in the blood.'

'Watch.'

She picked up an iron and went through a well-oiled ritual of setting up, checking her grip, the distances between her feet, her body and the ball. She waggled the club a few inches behind the

ball to relax the muscles in her shoulders and forearms, then began to swing. There was something oddly erotic about it – the tightness of her jeans, how her upper arms bowed around her breasts, the grace of the backswing, the speed of her hands down and through the ball. It flew for what appeared to be miles, and then disappeared into the darkness at the limit of the floodlights.

She smiled at me. 'Know what turns me on? One of the things. A perfectly struck three-iron. I love how it jets off into space, reaches the top of its flight, appears to just hang there for a second and then drops straight down to earth.'

'That shot was unbelievable,' I said.

She shook her head. 'Bit of fade. Lost fifteen yards. You have a go.'

I took out the biggest club in the bag, a driver.

'It's the hardest club to use,' she said.

'I don't care.'

'I can't wait to see this.'

I stood there, suddenly nervous, thinking all one hundred golfers were watching me. When I looked down, the ball appeared as no more than a white speck at my feet. I wanted to get it over with. I drew back the club and lashed as hard as I could in a flurry of arms and metal.

'Jesus,' she said, peering off into the range.

'Where'd it go?'

She laughed and pointed down at my feet, where the ball lay untouched.

'Let me show you,' she said.

She stood behind me, pressing herself against my back, her hands over mine on the club. She took control and mapped out the swing for me. There was rhythm and poise; the club felt like an extension of my arms.

'I want another go,' I said.

'The bug has bitten.'

I swung again, trying to remember the tempo she had shown me. I hit the ball, not very well, and it hooked sharply to the left.

I tried again. The next went straighter, farther; another went farther still.

'This is fantastic,' I said.

'Dad used to practise for hours. He said it was the proudest moment of his life when he was the first non-European to become a member of the Colonial.' She wiped some hardened flecks of mud from the grooves of a pitching wedge. 'He probably got in because Mum was English.'

'Why did she marry him?'

'Because she did things for love, that's what he told me, and because she was pig-headed and stubborn.'

'So that's where you get it,' I said, laughing.

'No matter how much everyone disapproved, she was going to spend the rest of her life with her beloved brown boy. I suppose she did.'

We blasted away at the rest of the balls in the wire baskets, watching each other's every move, and I finally took her advice and began hitting nine-irons to achieve some consistency. With the last ball, I dared to try a five iron and was thrilled when I sailed over the 150 marker, albeit with a draw.

'Did you see that? Tiger Woods, watch your back,' I said, turning around.

She was sitting on a plastic chair against the back wall. Above her were posters advertising the latest titanium fairway woods, a sign explaining the club's custom fitting service. Ruth was silent, her face pained.

'What's the matter?' I asked. 'It wasn't that bad a shot.'

'I've done something terrible. Conor will never forgive me.'

'Dad?'

'I looked in his personal diary.'

I put the club in the bag and crouched in front of her. 'Why?'

'To find my father's telephone number. He never puts it on his letters to me, so I wanted to see if your dad had it. He did.'

'Did you ring?'

'Yesterday.'

'Why didn't you just ask Dad?'

'I was so ashamed. Do you know what it's like having to ask someone else for your own father's number? And I thought if Dad had told Conor not to give it to me, that would put him in an awkward spot. I didn't want that.'

'Did you get through?'

'Briefly. He had people there, laughing, enjoying themselves in the background. He was very charming, said he'd call me back. So I waited and waited. Yesterday. Today. I rang again. Only this time a young girl picks up and calls, "Daddy, some woman wants to talk to you." When he came to the phone, he told me it was his eldest daughter, and I thought, No, I am your eldest daughter. I didn't say it. There was a baby crying in the background and he said he had to go. I realise why he needs my money. So I took a deep breath, and told myself I deserved to know the truth, and asked him if he was ever coming to see me.' She paused, tears tracking slowly down her face. 'He said it was probably best I didn't call again.'

Around us the percussion of the driving range continued. I wondered if Robert still played golf. I hoped he would be struck by lightning. 'I love you,' I said. 'You know that.'

'I can't work out who I am supposed to be. I don't belong anywhere.'

'Yes, you do,' I said, taking her hand.

'Tell me,' she said. 'Tell me about the dress, when that mysterious woman's coming up the aisle.'

'It's off-the-shoulder and her hair is all up, but she has a few tendrils falling down on each side framing her face.'

'And what do you say?'

'I say, "Wow".'

The car engine idled as I dropped Ruth outside Kilkenny's; it was drizzling now, and the wipers swept across on delay, smearing oily droplets across the screen. She opened the car

door, pulled it to again, sensing as I did that we still hadn't sorted things out in our own minds, let alone publicly.

'I feel I've gone a little crazy over the last few days,' she said.

'Crazy is good. Insanity's a defence to virtually every crime.'

'Including crimes of passion?'

'Especially those.'

'I've thought about what you said. You're right. When this case is over and we know your brother is safe, then maybe that's the time. How does that grab you?'

'It grabs me.'

She leaned towards me and – perhaps it was wishful thinking – I thought she wanted to kiss me – properly. Though I regretted it for the rest of the night, I offered my cheek, which she duly pecked.

'We're still stuck on stage two, then?' she said.

'Looks like it.'

As I watched her disappear into the bar, I wondered if St Matthew was looking down on that particular bend of our particular river, because if he was, he would know that I had already committed another sin.

Unable to sleep that night, I logged on. I found the Boat of Horrors website and chatroom easily, and saw at first hand why domain names were so valuable. I opened another window on the VDU and quickly checked Rats' cybersquatting.

*www.sebastian-santos.com.*

It automatically bounced me on to a web domain broker; a pop-up screen appeared: THIS SITE COULD BE YOURS. CLICK HERE FOR . . .

Rats was sitting on his investment.

I clicked back to the chatroom and found I had to give a user name. Thinking of Ellen, I used a real one. I logged on as Killer.

Everyone on-line claimed to know Santos. He had lived everywhere, done everything; he had committed every crime in

every conceivable way – except the murder on the *Corinth*. The space cadets who infested the site were desperate to convince each other that Santos was the sacrifice in some monstrous state conspiracy. He was being recreated with a thousand different faces; people projected on to him their darker desires, the things missing from their lives, implicating him in their misery.

As my eyes glazed in front of the screen, the Sebastian Santos I kept seeing was a man who loved his family and who was being deprived of it. I wondered what that said about me and how things might turn out between Ruth, Frankie and me.

# Chapter Twenty-Four

The Catholic church was not far off our route from the office to the mortuary, and while Train waited outside, superstitious about entering a church at the behest of Sebastian Santos, I went in and added a candle to the cast-iron rack in front of a statue of the Blessed Virgin. I realised that I hadn't been in a church for years. The incense from an early morning service hung in the air, and I thought again of the Catholic camp at Gosburn and the Mass that was said the morning after Morton had drowned. The darkness of the church, chiefly illuminated in that corner chapel by the banks of candles, flickering gently as their wicks burned and spat, inspired me to kneel on a cushion for a few moments. I can't say that I prayed, but I did wonder about an accused murderer who wanted candles lit for a dead young girl.

There had been a fire in the building that usually housed the Central Mortuary, so the Home Office pathologists had to make do for the moment with the adapted subterranean floor of a teaching hospital that was shortlisted for closure. They had done their best in an emergency, but the extraction process was not perfect and Train kept sniffing the air, convinced he could smell rotting bodies. He tried to forget about it by humming 'Maria' from *West Side Story*, until I told him he was driving me nuts.

'I once did meet a girl called Maria,' he said.

'What was she like?'

'Weighed two hundred and fifty pounds and sprinkled cannabis on her cornflakes.'

'You know the nicest girls.'

'Can't say I know any girls any more. So come on, tell me about this pathologist again. What's the difference between a bull dyke and a diesel dyke?'

'You are the most un-PC person in the universe.'

'Hey, where I come from PCs are something you boost from store windows.'

'She's gay, OK? It's no big deal.'

I wish I had never told him. After the church, I'd given Train the gossip about the pathologist, Cynthia Hardy. She had been 'outed' in a national magazine, one of many 'leading lesbian women in the public eye', six months previously. Many people in law enforcement and criminal justice already knew or suspected, and it was no big deal to any of us, especially those who'd worked on a case with Cynthia. But then the tabloids took hold and ran with the story when a couple refused to permit Cynthia to do the post-mortem on their twelve-year-old daughter, who had died in a road rage incident.

The word in the legal business was that Cynthia had become very depressed about all this, and had taken to drinking. I worried for her, but hadn't come across her since the outing, and wondered how she was now coping.

Train seemed preoccupied with the digicam; he checked its zoom, held it up to his eyes. When he spoke it was quietly, and about something else. 'You know, Davey, I think I've taken a couple too many hooks to the melon to try to be subtle, so I'm only going to ask you this once and I'm going to ask it straight: do you know what you're doing with Ruth?'

I was silent. Though I was bursting to talk to someone about it and there wasn't anyone better than Train, I didn't know where to begin.

'OK, said I was only asking once.'

'It shows?' I asked.

'Like a lighthouse on a dark night. It's not just you. It's her too. What're you going to tell Frankie?'

'We haven't done anything, Train.'

'Think you left the word "yet" out of that sentence.'

'We weren't going to say anything until the case was over. Because it would . . . confuse things.'

'Now you sound like that sonofabitch.'

'Santos knows stuff about Frankie. But he won't talk if I win the case. When the case is over, Ruth, Frankie and I will sort it all out.'

Train put down the camera. 'Guess there're two kinds of people, then. One kind would be tempted to lose it.'

'I'm not that kind.'

'Think I'd be here if you were?'

We had to end the conversation when Cynthia Hardy came down the corridor, still wearing her green surgical gown.

'David,' she said, beaming at me. 'Sorry to keep you.'

'No problem, Cyn,' I replied.

She was a large woman, just under six feet tall. Her black hair was cut to just above the ear, and though her face and cheeks were full and rounded, she had a small, sharpish nose.

'Now, how can I help you?'

'The Telfer case,' I said.

The smile vanished from Cynthia's face. She looked down towards the smooth floor lining. 'You are perfectly entitled to obtain an independent post-mortem.'

'I don't need one,' I told her. 'I trust you.'

'Even though I'm on the other side?'

'Look, in the Katherine Calderwood case, do you think the jury would have returned unlawful killing if you hadn't agreed my asphyxia point? I know you, Cyn. After all the prosecution and defence, convict and acquit circus, you're after the truth.'

She was silent for a while. When she spoke, it was to Train and not to me. 'He's a very smooth talker, your boss, isn't he?'

'I never thought so,' Train said.

'And a bit of a hero with me, doing that case for three months for nothing.'

'Yeah, he has a heart of gold.' There was a cold sarcasm in Train's voice; I wondered if it was an anger directed at me because of the Ruth situation. I suppose we had become a surrogate family to him, and he saw that the relationship might jeopardise a set-up he felt at home in. If so, I was undoubtedly the principal culprit.

'Can we talk about the case?' I asked. 'You know there's no property in a witness, Cyn.' An ancient legal maxim that permits both sides to interview any potential witness to a case.

'I'm nobody's property,' she said. 'Except the tabloids.'

'They are such bastards,' I said.

'Powerful bastards,' she replied. Her face changed as she tried to shake herself out of the black mood just thinking about the tabloid scandal had induced. She worked up her public smile once more. 'OK, buster. You've charmed me and blinded me with legal science, so I suppose I'll answer the odd question.'

'I want to see the body,' I told her.

'We thought you would,' she said.

'We?'

'Naturally my staff called the case officer when we got your message last night. That's why we've kept you waiting. DI Ross wanted to be here herself.'

I looked at Train. He returned my stare and shrugged.

'I think the coroner's officer has arrived now as well,' Cynthia said. 'We've laid the body out in the dissection room.'

We rounded the corner and hurried down an echoing stairwell to the floor beneath ground level. I wondered if Train's instincts had been right. I thought I smelled the body.

* * *

The dissection room had walls entirely covered with large white tiles, and the floor was similarly decorated. Larger tiles were preferable, since it meant that there was proportionately less grout space between them, thus cutting down on areas in which germs and bacteria could accumulate. The ceiling had powerful lamps that sent down a cold bluish light, and this bounced around the room illuminating one thing in particular – the covered body. The room was little warmer than a fridge.

Jack Telfer, or what now remained of him, lay on a stainless-steel table in the very centre. He was covered head to foot with a green sheet, the same hue as the surgical gown that Cynthia Hardy wore.

A small group of people stood at the foot of the steel table. Ellen was there, dressed in a black trouser suit as opposed to her usual grey ones – her personal mark of respect for a fellow officer. She had more foundation on her face than I could remember her ever wearing, making her skin eerily white in contrast to her shock of red hair. With her was Leybourne, who fought hard to stifle a yawn; he had faint black smudges under his eyes and I wondered if he'd stayed up all night at his daughter's bedside. Also present was the coroner's officer – another cop, but supposedly independent of the inquiry.

Faced with the grimness of a corpse, Train did not protest when I gestured that he should start recording with the digicam.

A microphone came down from the ceiling and Cynthia Hardy reached up and switched it on. She gave the date and time.

'Viewing of the body of Jack Telfer. Ready?' She looked at me, and I nodded.

Cynthia slowly peeled back the sheet, starting from the head, and gathered it just below the soles of Telfer's incinerated feet. His head rested on some kind of curved laminated block, which sufficed as a pillow for the dead. There was a strange calmness about his face now, very different from the horrifying agony evident in the Polaroids I had seen. Post-mortem changes. I remembered that in the photographs his arms were above his head.

'The body has been repositioned after rigor?' I asked Cynthia.

'Yes,' she said.

'Do you object?' Ellen asked.

'I can understand a little respect for the family,' I replied.

'He had no family,' Leybourne added.

'It was respect for Jack,' Ellen said.

Train took his eye away from the viewfinder. He glanced at me, probably thinking the same as I was. The tape. Jack Telfer and Sorensen's wife. Sorensen's wife in widow's weeds at her first court appearance in Telfer's murder case. I forced myself to look at the charcoaled soles of Telfer's feet. My eyes tracked slowly up his body until I saw the corresponding burning around his neck. His necklace. There had been one item in the PM fax that had worried me, and I wanted to choose the right moment to resolve it.

'Cynthia,' I said quietly, 'this extent of surface burning would be unlikely to be fatal in itself?'

'Correct,' she replied. 'You'd need a far higher surface area for a fatal prognosis.'

I tried to remember the reading that had kept me up after I had had enough of the website chatroom. 'These burns – the feet, the neck – are deep, but not fatal?' I asked. 'Wouldn't violate the Rule of Nine?'

'I'm impressed,' she said.

'What's he saying?' Ellen asked.

'Mr Kilkenny rightly identifies a sliding scale of age and surface area of burning,' she replied. 'The Rule of Nine.'

I squatted down so that my eyes were level with the soles of Telfer's feet. At this proximity to the flesh, my stomach turned. I had not eaten that morning and didn't know if that enhanced or suppressed my nausea. I tried to recall the disturbing images so neutrally set out in my pathology book. The stages of human tissue deterioration with heat. I had to gauge where Telfer's flesh fell within the scale.

'This is more than heat cracking. More even than charring, I think,' I said to Cynthia.

'I would have to agree.'

'This tissue is virtually carbonised?'

'Yes, counsel.'

I moved to the head of the table, where Train was recording. He moved back to the other end, to film me.

'Similarly with the neck,' I said. 'Though less severe carbonisation.'

Cynthia nodded, said nothing.

I was back in the yacht, in the cabin, surrounded by the exquisite furniture. At my feet a body was being tortured with a blowtorch; into my nostrils curled the repellent smell of burning human flesh. But the face of the torturer was a blank to me, where previously it had always been Santos's. I was inches away from Telfer's face and thought no one deserved this; but it was as if the face didn't accept my pity and accused me with Santos's words: *Who am I to you? Another body on the battlefield whose rings can be robbed.*

'My understanding,' I said, talking more loudly to drown out the words in my head, 'is that protracted burning of the body can cause asphyxiation, even loss of consciousness?'

'Yes,' Cynthia agreed.

'But consciousness can be regained occasionally due to the "shock" of the pain?'

'For a limited time only.'

My hunch now led me to the question that remained from the PM report. 'There was a chemical found in his body?' I asked. 'Glycinol-2, I think.'

I had tried to look it up in my pharmacology references, but without success.

'Tracked it down this morning,' Cynthia replied. 'Or rather one of our student researchers did.'

'And?'

'It's an experimental drug. From the States. I think they've been trying to develop it for combat zones. To keep injured troops conscious.'

Another piece of the jigsaw fell into its slot in my mind. 'Oh, Jesus Christ,' I said to Train. 'He wanted to keep Telfer alive. He wanted to keep him conscious so that he could suffer for longer. This isn't a madman. This is cold-blooded revenge.'

Ellen stepped forward and pulled the sheet back over Telfer. She did not speak until she had carefully covered his head again, like a devoted mother tucking in her child at night. 'You're saying Santos wanted revenge?' she asked me.

'I'm saying the killer wanted revenge,' I replied.

We gathered in the echoing corridor outside the dissection room. We thanked Cynthia. It seemed a little absurd, almost as if we were guests taking leave of their hostess after a dinner party.

'You have got the man who did this?' Cynthia asked Ellen.

'We think so.'

'Please be right.'

I can't remember if anything further was said. It must have been, but I understood – and I'm certain Ellen did too – why Cynthia Hardy had chosen to spend her life in buildings such as this; not to get results, nor fame and fortune, but to work with the deceased for clues about their killers and thereby make the city a safer place in which to live. Put another way, if Ellen was wrong about Santos, Jack Telfer's killer was still at large.

Out in the carpark, Ellen and I found ourselves alone while Train put the digicam in the car and Leybourne phoned the hospital.

'You look tired,' I told her.

'Always knew how to sweet-talk a girl, Killer.'

'Must be all those trips to visit accused murderers on remand,' I said. She was silent and looked down, but I wasn't going to let it rest. 'You always used to do things by the book, Elles.'

'We need a new book, Dave.'

'What's wrong with the old one?'

'Keeps turning out the same old story. The guilty go free.'

'You got a break with the Montenegrin, then.'

'We'll see.'

'So you haven't actually interviewed him?'

'Going to Harmondsworth now.'

'Hang on, he could be a defence witness, you know. The missing link in proving my client's innocence.'

She laughed. 'Why do I think that's not going to happen?'

'Mind if I come along, interview him after you?'

'What would DCI Leybourne say?'

'He'd probably hate it, but can't you dress it up as your cunning plan to infiltrate the mindset of the defence?'

'He'll still hate it.'

That's how we arranged things, despite the protestations of Leybourne and Train. I drove Ellen out to the detention centre, and we talked about our time in training, related news about classmates, and people we knew in the force.

As we neared Heathrow, the traffic began to pile up, with cars indicating left for the airport spur; beyond the junction one lane was closed with roadworks. Our progress slowed, but it didn't seem to matter since our conversation rattled on as in the old days, and I hoped Ruth would not ask what she had asked before, because the thought of sleeping with Ellen flashed across my mind despite myself.

'Ever take any other girl on that moonlit shag on the river?' she asked.

'No, that was just for you.'

'Guess we've missed that boat.'

'Next lifetime, you're on.'

'Next time round you'll be reincarnated as a slug,' she said. 'Or was that this one?'

'Hey!'

'Sorry, I was thinking about your client.'

'That's your take on Santos, is it?'

She wound down the window and turned her face towards

the fresh air, as if the thought of Santos had made her nauseous.

'Actually, though I hate to admit it, he's a brave bastard,' she said.

'Why?'

'He eventually turned informer when he came across this cartel plan to extort money from a telecommunications magnate. They'd kidnapped this man's daughter and were demanding thirty-seven million, I think – something like that. What they didn't at first realise was that the girl was his stepdaughter, and he was going to divorce her mother, who he hated with a passion, and basically he couldn't give a shit about the girl. The deadline approached and still no negotiation from Stepdaddy. Santos knew the cartel couldn't afford to back down either, and the clock kept ticking, until it was time to kill the girl.'

'What was the girl's name?' I asked.

'I can't remember. Although Santos ran the money-laundering side of the cartel, he insisted on checking how they were treating the girl. They say that when he took off her gag and asked how she was, she spat at him. She wasn't a beauty, in fact a bit of a brat, but she never cried. Not once. She told him that she would die because her stepfather hated her, and she begged Santos to kill her first because the guards said they were going to rape her before she was murdered. We don't know why this particular girl affected him, why this crime out of all those he must have witnessed was the one – all we know is that Santos had had enough. He came in. He told the DEA about the plot, where they were keeping her, everything. He made his family a cartel target for the rest of their lives to save this rather unlovely little girl.'

'Her name was Anna? Anna Beth?'

'Yes, that's it, Anna Beth Archer. How did you know?'

'Santos told me. He also told me she was dead.'

'Dead? He was in protective custody by the time of the rescue. I never heard that she died.'

'So why did he tell me she had?'

'Probably some sick joke.'

By now I'd pulled up in the DC carpark. We made our way to the visitors' area and were signing in when an administrator, a small West African woman with a pierced eyelid, came to meet us.

'DI Ross?' she said. 'We've been trying to contact you urgently.'

Ellen checked her mobile. She'd left it off during the journey.

'There is a problem. Your witness was found. He was hanging from his bed frame.'

We went back to the car. I watched while Ellen made calls back to the NCS and arranged for their special scenes-of-crime technicians to attend. Leybourne said he would come out to see the body *in situ*. We waited in my car. The other two crew members, the Albanians, were under guard, but were verging on hysteria and babbling on about evil spirits, one of the guards told us.

'Santos,' Ellen said.

'You don't know that. It could have been the Albanians, stopping him breaking ranks.'

'How did Santos know where the Montenegrin was?'

I remembered my conversation with Santos the previous day. 'I told him.'

'Jesus, Dave.'

'But how could he have acted that fast?'

'Come on. Prisons, DCs – they're the place to get someone killed.'

'So quickly?'

She paused, then said, 'How long does it take to kill a man?'

Around us friends and relations of those who were about to be deported from these islands came and went; young women cried, children ran about as if the carpark were a playground. The

ambulance that had arrived before us, called the moment the body was found, was parked up, lights off; the paramedics leaned against it, catching a sly smoke. Ellen asked if I wanted to come and see the body, but viewing the remains of Jack Telfer earlier had been enough. She tried to tease me, suggesting I'd gone soft, indulging in a kind of gallows humour – let's see how it's hanging, let's see if he's still hanging around – that I knew to be totally alien to her. I realised from this and from her pale cast that the invitation was not for my benefit but for hers.

'Tell me what's up, Elles,' I said.

'Can't stop thinking about Pete.' She lit a Camel. 'He'll never talk about it, even after all these years, which makes my imagination fly sky-high. The more of all this I see, the more I think of Pete, abandoned in that lay-by with the model aeroplane and its broken bloody propeller, and his attacker, cool as you like, driving away untouched by the law. I'm sick of them, Dave, people who think they can walk away from what they've done.'

'That's why you can't let go of Santos?'

She took a long drag and exhaled slowly, filling the car with smoke. 'Why I can't let this case go.'

The sun came out; it shone for a few seconds over the detention centre, then was swallowed again by the clouds.

# Chapter Twenty-Five

The next morning, I made my way through the crowds that milled around the stalls and pitches of the street market. It was an ancient right of trade that permitted a weekly market the length of Cable Street, producing a carnival of coloured fabrics, piles of spices and exotic fruits, carvings, trinkets – all a legacy of the ships that had unloaded their cargo in the city for five hundred years. In truth, I wasn't quite sure what I was looking for, but the minute I saw it I knew. I handed over a two-pound coin, told the vendor to keep the change, and headed back to Kilkenny's.

I asked Jimmy Corrigan, one of Dad's oldest friends, to give Ruth a five-minute break, and ushered her into the kitchen.

'I can't stay that long,' she said. 'That Jimmy helps himself to as many drinks as he serves.'

'Where's Dad?'

'I made him keep his doctor's appointment. Those pins and needles are getting worse.'

I took the crumpled brown paper bag out of my pocket. 'I bought you something.'

She wiped her hands on her jeans and opened the bag. 'It's . . . it's astonishing,' she said.

The porcelain figurine reflected the bright light above us as she cupped it in her hands. It was of a pig dressed in golfing plus-

fours and a pork-pie hat, taking an agricultural swipe at a ball with an antiquated driver.

'It was the only golf-related thing I could find in the market,' I said.

'I love it.' She looked at me, then the pig. 'I thought so. His swing reminds me of yours.'

Jimmy Corrigan put his head around the door with a telltale moustache of froth around his lips. He said there was a problem with one of the pumps, and Ruth told him she'd be out in a moment. She carefully wrapped her gift in the paper bag, then kissed me on the cheek.

'Now that's what I call wooing,' she said.

I wandered home pleased, I have to confess, with my morning's work – or lack of it. I felt I deserved some time away from the Santos case, and while searching for Ruth's present for the first time put the case out of my mind. It couldn't last. When I entered the office, Train was sitting with his feet propped on a brief on the desk. I couldn't see his face at first since he was holding a morning newspaper, not our usual one, open in front of him. There was something else odd: he had taken the phone off the hook. He lowered the paper. 'You don't know, do you?'

'What?'

He slowly swung his feet off the desk, neatly folded the paper and handed it to me. 'Phone's been ringing crazy.'

I saw the computer screen. It was logged on to the Boat of Horrors website.

'Anything useful?' I asked.

'Full of junk. But read the paper.'

In the letters section the following was printed:

*Sir –*

*I have recently enjoyed – if that is the word – the hospitality of your National Crime Squad, and write to relate to your*

*readers one or two of my more colourful experiences in that capacity. I should state at the outset that I am currently charged with murder in what has become known in publications a little more sensation-seeking than yours as the 'Boat of Horrors' case. Thus for all the usual legal reasons I am restrained from making any comment one way or another about that case. For the moment*

*My family came to these shores because we understood that not only have you contributed to the world* King Lear *and* Hamlet, *the full English breakfast and net curtains, but above all these things the right to a fair trial by a jury of one's peers. I wanted my children to grow up in a society where respect for others and the rule of law are an unspoken part of the fabric of life. But perhaps not all of your readership is aware of the fact that secreted away in the dark places of your capital men are still kept in what are little more than medieval dungeons.*

*Since I have been in custody, and again I refrain from comment upon my own treatment, I have either witnessed or been informed about prisoners who have been beaten about the body and face with torches (a favourite, I understand), who have been deprived of warmth, sleep, and access to an attorney. Lest it be thought that these allegations have been fabricated, I have copied this letter to the legal officers of Amnesty International, Justice and Liberty. I understand that the aggrieved parties are filing sworn affidavits. Thus the question I ask, one which was not coined by me but by a very wise man centuries ago, is: Who guards the guards? Who polices the police?*

*I have the honour to remain,*
*Yours faithfully,*
*Sebastian Santos. (address provided)*

I looked at Train, who placed the receiver in the cradle and then took it off the hook again when it rang instantaneously.

'They want to know if we have any comment,' he said. 'I was about to give them a comment or two of my own, but I bit my

lip. Davey, what's Santos pulling? What does this prove? I mean, that stupid editorial makes it clear—'

'What editorial?' I said as my eyes scanned across to the leader paragraphs.

WHO POLICES THE POLICE?

The letter printed in these pages from Mr Sebastian Santos has been vetted by a team of legal practitioners specialising in libel and contempt. It is far from usual to print a letter from an accused man, but the issues of public importance that Mr Santos raises, in the view of this newspaper outweigh the controversial circumstances that surround most aspects of his case. We make no judgment as to his guilt or otherwise; indeed, he has not used his correspondence as a veiled plea of innocence. However, regular readers will well remember the doubts expressed in these columns about the creation of a *national* police force. Consequently, we publish the letter as a testament to our continuing commitment to the freedom of the press and to our concern about domestic abuses of basic human rights. We formally reopen the debate about the legitimacy of the NCS, the National Crime Squad. Is it really serving the nation?

Then I understood. I thought I did. 'He's paving the way,' I told Train.

'For what?'

'For how he'll want me to run the case in court. God, he's smart. He's not saying he's innocent of murdering Telfer.'

'Then what is he saying?'

'That someone in the NCS might just be guilty.'

'That's total bs.'

'Really? You watch how this will run and run. How many times have you heard of an accused murderer being published by a respectable national newspaper before the case even comes to trial? He's ahead of the game.'

'Well, that tallies with the word on the street,' Train said.

'How do you mean?'

'This attorney I used in Miami once. Now he's in LA and is representing a runner for a cartel who knows someone – you get the picture, it's not exactly admissible in court.'

'What's the bottom line?'

'That's it. There isn't one with this guy Santos. It just goes on and on, deeper and deeper. He's honourable, he's evil. He's powerful, he's got even more powerful enemies. The cartels are after him, the cartels are trying to rescue him from the Feds. The only thing folk agree on is that every single person who's crossed him has been well and truly fucked.'

'Great.'

'Thought that'd cheer you.'

'Anything else?'

'Well, look. This is from the most unreliable source. A snitch I didn't even want to know in Riker's, but he kind of hung around me for protection. This guy would rat out his own mother. In fact, I think he did.'

'What did he say?'

'Word on the snitch grapevine, and he had no details, was that – how did he put it? – that Santos was "more sinned against than sinning".'

# Chapter Twenty-Six

My alarm woke me at 6 a.m. on the day of the committal. The radio buzzed with reports about the impending proceedings. I turned the dial through BBC stations, talk radio shows, taking in snippets of the hype.

> The Boat of Horrors comes to court today – committal proceedings begin today against Sebastian Santos, charged with the murder of – Mr Telfer is thought to have been working undercover when – Sebastian Santos, accused of murdering detective Jack Telfer, will be in the dock today – Sebastian Santos the man who challenged us to investigate our investigators, will today – sources say the defence will apply to discharge – the so-called Boat of Horrors website yesterday reached 250,000 visitors – civil liberties groups are calling for a public inquiry into the National Crime Squad's terms of – it is anticipated that the defence will apply for Mr Santos's release.

The words came out of the early morning gloom and appeared to hang around me; I felt paralysed for a moment, as if a stone lay across my chest. My head spun. My throat was sandpaper-dry, making it difficult to swallow, and I imagined that it was my neck that had been burned away with the blowtorch. I reached

out, grabbing the bottle of Highland Spring beside my bed, and took a long draw. The cool water snaking down my throat calmed me a little, and I reminded myself that these moments before a case started, the lull before the storm, were the worst. Cases invariably worked out. And yet the simple shadows on the wall refused to behave, resolving in my drowsy mind into figures from the case: Jack Telfer on the slab, Anna Beth Archer with Santos's candle in her hand; Ellen's brother Pete, walking through his life with the secret of those seven days and nights still locked inside him. I finished the bottle with a second long draught and tried to think of good things, of Ruth.

Even before I knocked on Dad's kitchen door, I could smell the tar-like coffee brewing from within. When he opened up, he kissed me on the cheek, his silvery bristles rubbing against my skin. There was a spark in his eye, a hint of excitement. I saw that he was cooking for me.

'Dad, you've not made me boxy,' I said.

'Thought it might do you some good,' he replied.

He returned to the oven where potato pancakes sizzled, spitting little drops of the overheated oil; the edges of the cakes were crisped dark brown. He flipped one over with a metal spatula, creating another outburst of sizzling as the oil fried the raw batter.

'Saw the case on the TV this morning,' he said. He spoke to me over his shoulder as I poured us both a mug of black coffee. 'They're making a grand song and dance about it.'

'Yeah, it's pretty crazy.'

'I could see all these cameras and reporters and barriers around the court. And I thought, my son's doing that case.'

They tasted as good as anything I'd eaten in years, those unhealthy fried potato pancakes that my father cooked for me that morning. He had made them for me, not for Frankie and me, for the boys – just for me.

He put his arm on me briefly before I left. 'Son, I got another bill. A red one,' he told me. 'I would be fine, only I lent Jimmy Corrigan ninety quid – well, he said it was for his daughter's wedding. I know you're as short as me.'

I got out my wallet and cheque book. I wrote a blank cheque.

'Probably bounce,' I said, and we both laughed.

He waited for a moment, as if he needed a moment's stillness before he could say what he wanted. 'Your mother would have been proud of you, son.'

'I wish that was true.'

'When she was in labour, and there were complications, I think she knew. She said if things didn't work out, she'd wait for me on the other side of the river. That's how she put it. Conor, on the other side of the river. At her funeral the priest said, "God may be beyond our comprehension, but he is not beyond our reach." She would have known what to do with you and Frankie. I've made a grand mess of it. But I've tried, son. I've tried. You know, sometimes when you were both boys and I was shooting the river, I swear I could feel something out there. I don't know if it was just the distance of the stars or the strength of the tides. Something. I asked whatever that something was to tell me the right thing to do about my boys. Everyone said back then that a man couldn't bring up two kids on his own. The authorities wanted me to put you boys up for fostering. But I reached out on the river and found . . . something. Something that told me to keep you boys.'

'Why are you telling me this?' I asked, even as I imagined him there on the police launch at night, staring over the water to the farthest riverbank, searching for his bride.

'I wasn't going to say this,' he said. He appeared to be arguing with himself, making a case for both sides. 'I'm going to have to say it,' he went on. 'Davey, let me say this. I asked you this once before. You said then you knew what you were doing.'

'I had to give evidence at the inquiry,' I said.

He held up his hand. 'Does it matter now which of us was right?'

The answer shot into my head instantly: these things always matter in a family – they matter for always.

'I don't think you should do the case,' he said. 'It's too dangerous a game you boys are playing.'

'Frankie wants me to play it,' I replied.

'Your brother is wrong,' he said.

'I have to protect him in court if I can.'

'Does proving me wrong mean so much to you?' he asked.

'It's not about that.'

'I admit it,' he said, as if he hadn't heard me. 'Honest to God, you're a fine lawyer, now what more have you to prove?'

'I ran from the force. I'm not running from this.'

'If I asked you not to do it?'

'Dad.'

'If I ordered you?'

'I'm not a kid any more. I'm going to make decisions for myself.'

'You make the wrong decisions,' he said.

# Chapter Twenty-Seven

Train and I went on foot, guessing that the traffic would be chaotic around the court and that the walk would do us good. We carried the case papers, Archbold, the criminal law bible, and Stones, the manual of procedure and practice in the magistrates' court. I also took my laptop to make a typed note of the evidence, magistrates' courts not providing a transcript of the proceedings. We turned past the old flower market, redeveloped into a terrace replete with designer plant shops, and saw that the court circus was already in business. I tried, in vain, to block it all out, to concentrate on the special procedures of a 'contested' committal in an NCS case: a mixture of the old and the new, the fast-tracking of the case, the otherwise abolished jurisdiction of calling 'live' witnesses at the committal.

Television trucks, gawpers, reporters, furry microphones, uniformed police. Banners calling for an NCS inquiry were held by the civil liberties groups that had latched on to the case, hoping to use it as a platform from which to air their views. The instant we reached the pointed High Gothic entrance to the court, the media scrum surged towards us. Microphones and hand-held recorders were pointed at me. Train cut a path through the reporters. He enjoyed his role, like he was some kind of personal bodyguard.

'We have no comment at this time,' he kept saying.

I glanced up to try to see the scales of justice high above the court entrance, but it was shrouded in fog, as though there were a low ceiling over the whole city, pressing everything down, squashing us all together. Suddenly the stillness within the lobby of the court claimed us. Security guards shut the noise out as Train and I stood at the checkpoint to be searched.

We went down the damp slate steps at the rear of the lobby and into the cell area. The outer door was large and black, with a rounded top, more the shape of a castle's portcullis – not surprising since this relic of worn wood had been salvaged from Newgate Prison and had sealed the corridor where the convicted murderers were kept before their execution. I had to knock three times before a jailer with a big boyish face led us down to Santos's cell.

The custody area was cold, like a meat storage section, and I wondered whether they had simply not turned on the heating since Santos was the only prisoner. I could see the square of light on the stone floor at the very end of the corridor, created by the bulb in Santos's cell shining through the open wicket gate.

'No computers and no mobile phones in the cells,' the jailer said to me as he opened the heavy door. 'Prison regulations.'

'I haven't got a power lead,' I pointed out.

'All right,' the man said.

I felt guilty, not wanting to take unfair advantage of his slowness. 'Actually, the laptop's got batteries, but I won't use it,' I told him.

He smiled at me. 'All right.'

There was a faintly familiar smell in the corridor. Not the detergent fumes, cigarette smoke or fried breakfast smells common in cell areas. This was floral.

'You wearing cologne?' I asked Train.

'Oh, yeah, I always put on aftershave to visit a psycho.'

Santos stood with bare feet on the wall-bench at the end of his cell and tried to peer out of the barred window, which was barely above ground level. I saw his shoes on the floor, placed

neatly together. But more striking than this was the fact that along either side of the cell were plants with small star-shaped white flowers.

He turned and looked at me, smiling with great charm. 'The last of the winter jasmine,' he said. In the cold, small clouds of vapour rose from his mouth as he spoke.

Winter jasmine.

The plants Ruth had bought me, the smell of her hair.

Santos stepped down off the bed and carefully put his shoes back on.

'I got them for you,' he said. 'Your brother's office was full of these plants. Look upon these poor specimens as a peace offering to my champion on the morning of battle. This jailer is a kind but simple soul,' he went on. 'So different to the brutes in the high-security prison.' He looked now at Train. 'Do you think my facial injuries have healed, Mr Nelson?'

'I can think of some folk who'd freshen them up for you,' Train replied.

'I do find the . . . argot of the urban African-American fascinating,' Santos said.

Train edged forward, yearning to begin the freshening process immediately. I moved in front of him.

'I had to offer the jailer my cashmere socks to get the jasmine,' Santos said.

'Where'd you get cashmere inside?' I asked.

'You can get anything done for you in prison.'

'Including having a man killed?'

'Including that, I suppose. I was talking hypothetically.' Santos rubbed his thin pink ankles as they protruded above his shoes. He looked up at Train and blinked slowly. His eyes were wide and clear, the eyes of a child. 'You still haven't changed your tailor,' he said.

'That's it, Davey,' Train said. 'Enjoy the freak show.'

The cell door opened and closed once more, leaving me with Santos. The smell of wild jasmine was in my nose and my mouth.

Santos picked up one of the sprigs and it cut an arc in the air, a few of the white petals falling off, spinning end over end as they fluttered down.

'Has your laptop got Internet access?' Santos asked. 'I'd love to log on to the site that's been opened in my name. I accept that the Net brings out the worst in people. But sometimes there's a little truth to be found on the Web.'

'They say all sorts of things about you.'

'I wonder if a single one is true.'

'I know one true thing.' I let it hang in the air, but he wouldn't be drawn. 'Ellen Ross told me about that girl.'

'Girl?'

'Anna Beth Archer, how you came in to save her.'

'I was going to come in anyway. I had become tired, I suppose.'

I sensed that he was actually embarrassed by all this, as if his good deed were a sign of weakness, something too personal to discuss.

'Why did you ask me to light the candle?' I asked.

He put his feet up on the bench now, wrapping his hands around his knees as he spoke, and this caused him to rock slightly. 'When I told them where she was, they promised me that they would surround the warehouse and negotiate with her captors. I knew these men. I knew deep down they were cowards. They could be talked out. But of course the authorities were not going to honour their promise to someone like me, they always think they know better, and the SWAT teams went in all guns blazing. But they weren't blazing in all the right directions. They missed the final kidnapper. He shot Anna Beth through the eyes before they got him. Miss Ross hasn't told you that, has she?'

'No.'

'I think the police rarely tell the truth about operations that go wrong. That's what we've got to make the NCS do in this case, Mr Kilkenny. Tell the whole truth.'

'That's the point of your letter to the newspaper? Expose the NCS's dirty washing?'

'Don't you think the public has a right to know what's being done in its name? Of course you do. That's why you told the truth at the corruption inquiry. I wonder if I'll meet with more success than you?'

'The only issue today is whether there is enough evidence to send you for trial.'

'A prima facie case,' Santos said. 'There's no need to talk down to me.'

'The evidence already is a prima facie case, *ceteris paribus*,' I said, throwing some legal Latin back at him.

'Other things being equal,' Santos translated. 'But other things are not equal. Especially not in Limb Two Galbraith country. I understand there are other experimental schemes with committals – abolishing them altogether in serious cases. What do you think of this special NCS jurisdiction? Will they abolish it, too?'

I was about to continue the exchange when I realised that it was precisely the type of legal cut and thrust that I would encounter in court with a prosecutor or a judge. I didn't expect it with a client.

'Surprised?' Santos asked.

'Nothing surprises me about you,' I said. His eyes suddenly lit up at what he took to be a compliment, until I added, 'Even your guilt.'

'Do you believe in another life? After this one?'

'You understand how important this committal is?'

'I believe. I have to. This one's been too full of ugliness for me to believe this is all life has to offer. I think you've seen the ugly things too.'

'Some of them,' I said.

'Limb Two Galbraith, a thorny legal problem,' he said.

Santos had clearly been reading up on the applicable law and understood that if there was *some* evidence upon which a

reasonable jury properly directed *could* convict, then the case had to be sent for trial. Santos would end up at the Bailey. It was a very low threshold for the prosecution to pass.

'You haven't asked me yet,' he said.

'What?'

'About the . . . new evidence.' Before I could reply, he continued, 'Which means you don't know – which means you haven't seen our opponents yet this morning. I suspect you're going to have to think about the case all over again.'

'What are you talking about?'

'My confession,' Santos said.

The first instinct of an advocate, my first instinct in that moment, is to think back through the case papers, wonder how you could have missed the evidence. But this was too big. No one could have missed it.

'Yes, the police will tell you I confessed. The case officers told the jailers that the hearing would go . . . what's the term?'

'Go short,' I said.

'They think the committal is now a formality since I've confessed. I think it just makes things more interesting.'

'What are they saying?'

'That I confessed to Ellen Ross, when she visited me inside.'

'And naturally you will deny it.'

'No,' he said, letting the word hang there. 'You will deny it for me.'

The tactical permutations of the altered case rose before me. New evidential paths opened up. Others were shut. Trying to get a case thrown out at a committal when there was a confession? I'd never heard it done.

'I'd have thought they'd have been interested in the false name I used. Is there any evidential significance in that?' Santos asked.

His words were background music to the legal calculations being made in my mind. Did a confession in itself constitute a prima facie case? If so, it was all over even before we'd stared – just as the jailers had taunted Santos.

'Mr Kilkenny?'

'Who cares about your name? You were an informant. Given a new identity. Casas was probably next on their list. Now tell me exactly what Ellen—'

'I doubt you will find Casas on any list.' Something moved across his face. There was the hint of a smile around his eyes, though his lips remained fixed and serious.

'You chose the name Casas?' I asked.

'It chose me.'

'So why Casas?'

Santos turned, walked past me, crushing as he did so some of the jasmine flowers beneath. 'My son – Gabriel, the eldest – had a dog. A mountain dog puppy, like the ones his mother used to have. He took it everywhere, cycling with it in the basket of his bicycle. And he loved it dearly, until one day it turned on him. One day it turned and bared its teeth and tore flesh from his forearm. After I shot it, he insisted that I bury it in the garden. Gabriel used to sit out next to it into the night till we insisted he came in.'

'Don't tell me, the dog was called Casas,' I said.

'You really don't see, do you?' he responded. 'How those we love can turn on us.'

'That's the point of your heartbreaking little tale?'

'And even when they tear out our flesh, we still try to find ways to love them. Families. Familiar to us, yet always unknown.' He leaned his slight frame against the wall and stared at the floor. 'Do you really think I'm foolish enough to confess?'

'The question is whether the court believes it.'

'Spoken like a lawyer.'

'Your lawyer.'

'So you're not going to withdraw? You said – we agreed – that if you came to believe me guilty you would withdraw. Have we not reached that moment? No doubt you implicate me in the death of our Montenegrin shipmate.'

'You could have arranged it. It would have been difficult to organise so quickly, but it's possible. The easiest way would have been to get the Albanians to do it.'

'But they haven't been charged?'

'No.'

'And they are not going to testify against me?'

'They've said nothing, so they're being deported.'

I suppose I could have withdrawn. Claimed I was professionally embarrassed. Maybe that's what I should have done. But Frankie wanted me to do the case, and I needed the work, so I was not going to walk.

'You'll fight the case?' he asked.

'We're not going to win.'

'That depends on how you define we,' he replied. 'I am sure you'll try your hardest in my cause. Because otherwise who knows what might be said about Francis?'

'You're always lashing out, aren't you? You will never let anyone get near.'

'And you will?' When I was silent, he added, 'You see, David, how alike we are.'

'As soon as this case is over, you're going to leave my family alone,' I told him.

'I think you'd secretly like your brother to be in trouble. I think you'd like a free run at the girl. Two brothers loving the same girl. A recipe for disaster – remember Jesus was betrayed with a kiss.'

I took the sprig of jasmine from his hand.

'I bought it for you anyway,' he said. 'Just as Ruth buys you boys jasmine.'

I whispered to him, my mouth right at his ear, 'Don't ever mention her again.'

He grinned at me, revealing his small round teeth. He whispered back, 'Ruth.'

My hands came away from his body before I knew it, coiled themselves into fists, and I was about to knock him into the wall.

He saw the rage in my eyes, and in his satisfaction at inducing this I saw that too.

'You're a violent man. I want you to be violent in court for me. It would feel good to hit me, wouldn't it? You would enjoy hurting me. Hold on to that. Use it in court.'

The years slipped away before me. I was no longer in his perfumed cell but in my dressing room before my last fight. How they prepare a boxer. Find his raw nerve. Then cut away at it, and keep cutting until he not only wants to hurt his opponent but to damage him irretrievably, until he wants to kill him in the ring and the fight will only be over when the other man is dead. That's how I used to feel, and how I felt again in Santos's cell.

I went upstairs and saw the media and the public barging each other as they fought to squeeze into the courtroom, all wanting to see Sebastian Santos. A girl stepped in front of me, her hair shaved to a stubble, giving an edge to her pretty face; she held out a leaflet, a page of photographs, all of beaten and bruised men, the alleged victims of NCS brutality. I took it; she thanked me, revealing a gold stud on her tongue.

I looked for a friendly face in the madness, for Train. I saw him, but he was not alone. Standing by the door to Court Number One was Frankie.

# Chapter Twenty-Eight

I noticed Train staring hard across the old court lobby, towards the entrance to the building itself, where Leybourne stood, his eyes fixed on Frankie. Train gave Leybourne his felon's stare, a fix of the eyes that was the prerogative of someone who had done hard time inside and had lived to tell the tale. The mustiness of the fog came off the damp clothing of the crowd. People milled about with upturned collars and hunched shoulders; some stamped their feet to keep the circulation going.

'That mother keeps on looking,' Train said as I reached him.

'He's the least of our worries.'

'How'd it go with Vlad the Impaler?'

'Pretty well. He's confessed, of course. But otherwise pretty well.'

Train shook his head. 'Remember those times in the ring when you were trapped in the other guy's corner and your lip was splitting and your bones were breaking?'

'Yeah.'

'That was more fun than this, wasn't it?'

'Definitely,' I said.

'The sick sonofa confessed?'

'They say.'

Train took my case papers and computer and left, saying, 'The sick sonofabitch confessed.'

Frankie and I were alone, to the extent you can be alone when dozens of people are jostling in all directions. I led him to a deserted corner of the lobby, far from the courtroom entrance.

'Why are you here?' I asked.

'To hear what's being said.'

'It could be dangerous.'

'You still think I was on the boat, don't you?'

'I want to believe you,' I said.

'Can you get me into court?'

I scanned his face and I sensed the truth. 'Santos made you come, didn't he? When he phoned you on his mobile.'

Frankie looked up, drained and tired, like he had looked in the nightclub. 'I *have* to be here,' he whispered.

'Santos made you?'

He shook his head warily.

'We finish the case, then they're all out of our lives for good,' I said.

'Don't throw it, just lose it.'

'He could still talk.'

'That's a risk I'll have to take.'

Train had placed my brief in the front row of the court, directly facing the raised bench. The ring binder containing all the hole-punched statements remained closed, and still missing was Ellen's statement about Santos's confession. The case would turn on this. Train opened a blue counsel's notebook. The paper was faintly lined and serrated half an inch from the left-hand side so that a note could be torn out swiftly. He held his fountain pen at the ready. His handwriting was copybook neat. I moved in next to him, with Frankie on the other side, on my right and nearest the aisle.

'Are you sure I can sit up here?' Frankie asked.

'Let's see if anyone objects,' I said. 'The prosecution lawyers won't know who you are.'

'Unless Ellen tells them.'

I looked around and could not see her. 'Or Leybourne,' I pointed out.

'He won't object to me being here.' Frankie said. 'He just wishes I was in the dock too.'

In the dark wood of advocates' row I saw that someone had carved a gallows and a stick-man dangling from a noose. Many men had been sent from this court to the Old Bailey and 'thence', as the sentencing judge used to say, to a place of execution. Tyburn or the gallows at Newgate Prison. My fingers traced the stanchions of the graffitied gallows. The wound in the wood was fresh and bright. Condemned men from the Bailey were made to walk from the court building to the prison via Deadmen's Gallery, an enclosed stone passageway under which they knew their unconsecrated bodies would be buried. Convicted murderers were made to walk over their own graves. A process begun in this very courtroom.

Being one of the oldest surviving examples of legal architecture in the country, Court Number One was not ergonomically friendly. The wooden benches in which we were now squashed were hard, like church pews. The carpet beneath our feet had worn right through, so there were circles of cold stone on the floor where each person sat. I glanced up at the illumination above, at the cast-iron fittings, and saw a faint webbing between the various bulb holders. High above us, surveying the human circus beneath, was a family of spiders.

Above the stipendiary's raised bench was the royal coat of arms. The lion and the unicorn. The two injunctions: *Hom soit qui mal y pense* and *Dieu et mon drout*. The courtroom was more like an amphitheatre in shape than modern courts, being narrow at the front and much wider at the back, so that the spiders would have seen a kind of fan below them, ribbed with rows. Each row was broken into three parts, there being aisles along each side of the central block. The prosecution were by convention on the left-

hand side of the court, since they were bringing the case and they would begin.

The court usher, a small, greying woman with thick glasses and a black gown, asked for my name for the court record. I gave it, glancing as I did to my left, to the prosecution team. The first I recognised as the Treasury counsel from the first appearance, Susan Mottram. But when I got a clear view of the second person, I knew for certain that the case would be contested bloodily right here in the magistrates' court. Mottram was now a mere junior in the prosecution team. Even though she was one of the most respected prosecutors in the city, she had been usurped by the man whose whispered orders held our opponents riveted.

He was James Stanfield.

Stanfield was senior Treasury counsel. He was the most experienced and admired prosecutor at the Bailey. He had reigned over prosecutions there with such force over the last decade that it was rumoured at the Bar that a new high-security prison had been built just to house his convicted prey. Apocryphal as the story was, it contained a grain of truth. Stanfield did not lose.

He prosecuted the most serious cases in the land to a guilty conclusion. I couldn't remember when I had last heard of him leaving the Bailey to appear at another crown court, and I had never heard of him going down to the magistrates' court for a committal hearing.

The Crown Prosecution Service and the National Crime Squad were taking no chances. They had instructed the best.

I looked at Stanfield in his jet-black suit, with his large, penetrating eyes, incongruous with his small mouth and nose, bloodless lips and black hair flat on his head, parted to one side. Stanfield affected a military bearing when he stood, which befitted a man whose ancestors advised the Duke of Wellington on the battlefield at Waterloo. His shoulders were pulled back exaggeratedly, but when someone asked him a question or when his concentration slipped, all those genera-

tions of drill and barracks vanished and he revealed a dowager's hump. It was not more than a little roundness behind the neck, but it gave the impression that he was constantly shrugging in disbelief that the accused man was not yet behind prison bars where he belonged.

Stanfield became aware of my presence and turned towards me. We were no more than ten feet apart. 'I presume you're Kilkenny,' he said.

'That's the only presumption you should make in this case,' I replied. I smiled. It was not returned.

'You have heard there's additional evidence?'

'I've heard Elvis is alive and is a bus conductor in Peckham – I don't believe everything I hear.'

Stanfield turned to Mottram and she gave him what I knew would be Ellen's statement about Santos's confession. 'Your man has confessed,' he said, handing over the photocopied sheets.

'He's not my man. And he's allegedly confessed.'

'Come on. A confession is an end to this hearing.'

'Or a new beginning,' I said. 'I'll need Ellen Ross to give live evidence.'

'The case against your man is overwhelming,' Stanfield said.

'Don't call the confession, then,' I challenged him. 'How confident are you of your circumstantial evidence?'

'Very.'

'Right. I agree to a paper committal solely on the circumstantials,' I said.

I was not going to accept Ellen's evidence for the purposes of the committal. It had been served on me late, and if the prosecution wished to rely upon it, I insisted they would have to call Ellen herself. In most committals, now done 'on the papers', Ellen's written statement would be admissible evidence and the case would be sent for trial. But the Statutory Instrument pilot scheme for NCS cases allowed the defence to insist on witnesses appearing for questioning. It was a small civil liberties concession to increasing police powers. The feasibility study

would probably abolish it anyway. But for now I had a chance. I would get a chance to cross-examine Ellen, As an alternative, however, I was prepared to accept as proved, solely for the legal argument at the committal, all the other physical evidence. The effect of that evidence could be summarised and reduced to a series of admissions. I would then argue that there was not enough evidence to send the case for trial. If the prosecution could get home on just the physical evidence, the committal would be over in a morning. There would be no live evidence. For a permanently busy man like Stanfield, this was very attractive. But only if he had faith in how overwhelming the rest of his case without Ellen was.

I could see him calculating as he considered this possibility. 'We'd have to use the video affidavit,' he said.

'We can have the argument,' I replied. 'You will lose that argument.'

The other crucial piece of evidence against Santos was the video recorded by Bill Sorensen. But Sorensen had not been found, and had used his black ops skills to remain out of sight. For the evidence to be admissible in court, the prosecution had to argue that it was relevant evidence that was unavailable to the Crown because the witness was in real fear of testifying. It was going to be difficult. The law had changed.

Stanfield glanced behind him and saw the prosecution team eagerly watching him. Mottram was accompanied by a round, squat man I took to be the CPS senior branch prosecutor; there were assistants and support staff and uniformed police officers, NCS detectives involved in the inquiry, and Leybourne, who was cleaning his steel-rimmed glasses. In the crown court, such legal horse-trading can be done in the comfort of the robing room, privy only to barristers. But here Stanfield had to deal in public. He was not used to it. I had grown up near the old fish market. Dad had sent me out to barter for kippers and haddock and plaice since I had been in shorts, so haggling in front of other people was nothing new.

'You won't accept any of the evidence of DI Ross?' he asked.

'Not a word,' I told him.

'I had hoped for a little co-operation. You know as well as I do that this pilot scheme is a nonsense.'

'I had hoped for more notice of an alleged confession than minutes before the committal hearing.'

'You haven't even read the statement yet.'

'Let me guess,' I said. 'It says that Santos admits killing Jack Telfer.'

I gazed around the packed courtroom. There were faces all around. I couldn't see Ellen with the prosecution team, or elsewhere in the courtroom. Momentarily, I wondered whether she had gone on the run like Sorensen.

'If you're not ready, we would consider an adjournment,' Stanfield offered.

'Let's do it now,' I replied.

If there was a delay, they might track down Sorensen, or he might come in. Today would be the best chance to win the case – if I wanted to win it. Delay might lead to more investigation, more trails that might lead to my brother. I thought of something else: putting off the case might mean putting off Ruth and me coming clean about our relationship.

'I'm firm in my belief that a full committal hearing is an abject waste of time,' Stanfield said. 'We might apply for costs against you.' He paused in his attempt to make me worry. 'Personally. Though I'm sure a busy practitioner like you doesn't need to worry about money.'

It would cost thousands and thousands with all the legal firepower and police resources. He was threatening to make me pay for it myself if I lost. 'Let's get this on,' I said.

I turned my back on him and looked at Train and Frankie.

'What are you doing?' Frankie asked me.

'If this case goes off, they'll investigate it more. We don't want them to investigate it more.'

'No,' Frankie said.

'I have told the court clerk that you will need some time,' Stanfield called across. 'You will need to consider the statement.'

There was a stir among the public behind us. The authorities had permitted them to enter the courtroom on two levels – in the gallery above the court, as normal, but also on the rear benches in the well of the court. There must have been close to one hundred citizens of the capital compressed into the ancient place. Their eyes zoomed in on the dock, which dominated the middle of the court space.

Into the cast-iron cage came two huge jailers in dark trousers and white short-sleeved shirts. One of them was even bigger than Train, and had hearts-and-daggers tattoos on his thigh-like forearms. His ginger hair was cropped on his head and the veins in his neck bulged over his collar.

'Knew a guard as big as that on the farm,' Train told me. 'Farm' was his slang for penitentiary. 'That guard had a dog. Mean, big Rhodesian ridgeback with teeth like steak knives. Scariest thing in the world. Except for this guy.'

'I'm sure his mother loves him,' I said.

'Uh-huh,' Train replied. 'Hope he scared the shit out of Santos.'

'Scares it out of me,' added Frankie.

A committal is the essence of the defence advocacy, an exercise in pure destruction. You don't even offer a positive defence. The sole purpose is to attack. To probe the weaknesses in the prosecution case theory. But it is risky. A full committal hearing, a 6(1), risks blowing your best ammunition before the trial, giving the prosecution an opportunity to see where they are weak and remedy the gap if the case is sent 'upstairs'. If you go for a win down here, you have one chance. You have to get it right.

The whispering gathered in intensity: Santos had entered court. He wore a small spray of jasmine in his buttonhole, and appeared delighted that he had drawn a full house.

* * *

Fifteen minutes later, Martin Jarrow's eyes fixed upon me over his half-moon glasses. 'Are the parties ready for committal?'

Stanfield stood. 'Prosecution is ready, sir.'

'Defence too,' I said.

'You've had enough time to discuss the new evidence with your lay client?' Jarrow asked.

'Yes,' I said.

'Open your case,' Jarrow told Stanfield.

Frankie edged closer to me, so that our heads were just inches apart. 'You're going to lose this?'

'With the confession? Probably,' I replied.

# Chapter Twenty-Nine

Stanfield took a minute sip of water, and replaced the glass tumbler in front of him with great care. 'On the night of the allegations,' he said, 'a motor-powered vessel, what is known as a superyacht, sailed along the Thames in the approximate region of the City of London. It is registered under the name *Corinth*, and in length is approximately—'

'Perhaps Mr Stanfield's forgotten that there is a video showing what happened to the yacht,' I said. 'Since it also shows my client, and this is not disputed, perhaps the court would like to see this? It might help.'

Train tried to conceal the smirk working around his lips, but without much success. 'Preach, white boy, preach,' he whispered to me.

'I would be assisted by seeing the video,' Jarrow told a furious Stanfield.

'But I would prefer to put my case into context,' Stanfield said.

'I have absorbed something of the background of this case, Mr Stanfield,' Jarrow told him.

I stood again, this time more concerned, but trying to smile to disguise the fact. 'Along with most of the country,' I said. 'But I'm going to ask the court to perform a task I know it is difficult for juries to perform, and purge any previous knowledge of the case. I am confident this can be done.'

'Indeed,' Jarrow said, nodding slightly.

Professional magistrates enjoy being told that they are better adjudicators of fact than the jury that would hear the case in the crown court. If the case went to trial, we would struggle long and hard to find jurors who hadn't heard about it. Down in the mags, we just assume a stipe can divorce his previous knowledge and prejudices about the case from the evidence he actually hears in his court. It's a legal fiction. But I was stuck with it. Given that reality, I had to make it work in my favour. Use it to oil Jarrow's ego.

He appeared to respond. He removed his glasses and peered at me with the glassy stare of the long-sighted. 'Isn't the issue in this committal extremely simple, Mr Kilkenny?' he asked me.

'Extremely,' I said. 'A body was found on the yacht.'

'DCI Telfer,' Stanfield broke in.

'Mr Stanfield says I am guilty of murdering the victim,' I said. A convention, a perverse shorthand. In court I become the accused – as the advocate, I am the man in the dock.

'And you say?' Jarrow asked.

'And I say prove it,' I replied. 'Prove it with live evidence before this court. Prove it with evidence that is properly admissible. I'm all in favour of the practice in PI cases in the High Court,' I told him, referring to personal injury actions, an area I was sure Stanfield would know little about. But working effectively as a sole practitioner, I had to consider practically every case in every field that came through my office door.

'That practice being?' Jarrow asked.

'Short opening speeches, calling on the evidence swiftly, letting the professional tribunal of fact judge the case quickly. Evidence not advocacy,' I said.

I could see the effect that this suggestion had on the stipe. Jarrow had his foot on the first rung of the judicial ladder. The Circuit and even the High Court benches might be within reach. An 'elevation' to the High Court could mean he'd be a knight, Sir Martin Jarrow; his wife, if he had one, would be Lady Jarrow.

The eyes of the LCD, the Lord Chancellor's Department, would be on him in this case, and I knew it. They would monitor how he coped with the circus surrounding the Boat of Horrors. Although his next step up the ladder would be as a recorder or a district judge, conducting the committal like a High Court judge might impress.

He replaced his glasses. 'Be brief in opening, Mr Stanfield,' he advised.

I sat down between Frankie and Train, and knew that my guerrilla tactics had shot holes through Stanfield's carefully prepared opening. Whether it would create much of a lasting dent in his confidence I doubted. I glanced back at Santos in the dock and caught his eye; I wanted him to see that I was trying.

Leybourne moved to Stanfield's shoulder. They whispered together, and Stanfield glanced over in our general direction, sizing us up, nodding. He shuffled to his right along the front row until he had reached Train's shoulder.

He whispered, 'I am told that that is your brother sitting next to you.'

'So what if he is?'

'He is a potential . . . witness in the case.'

'He's not a witness. He hasn't given a witness statement.'

I knew it was a curious omission.

Frankie had signed the lease-hire agreement for the yacht on behalf of the bank, after all. I had waited day after day as the date of the committal approached for the knock on our door, or the phone call, requiring Frankie to attend at the NCS building to give a witness statement. But it had never happened. Instead, the prosecution were relying upon a statement from an executive from the yachting company detailing the terms of the corporate hire. Leybourne had also obtained a statement from the finance director of Frankie's bank confirming that the bank had paid for the hire, since the man it knew as Casas was one of its clients.

They seemed to accept that Frankie was the poor sucker who

had signed on the dotted line for a yacht that ended up in flames. But how much did they know of Frankie's association with Santos in the US? I had to blow some smoke around my brother's position.

'I won't object if you want to call him,' I said.

'You won't?' he asked.

'But I'll have to apply for an adjournment. And I'll get it. I'd want to speak to the Ethics Committee about my professional position. You should have decided whether or not to use him before now. I'll be applying for wasted costs against you. But I'm sure a man of your means can afford it.'

'Is there a problem?' the stipe asked from the Bench.

'Just debating whether the case must go off,' I said.

'Well, we are not actually intending to call him now,' Stanfield said. 'Let me just have a word with the officer.'

He rejoined the prosecution ranks and I sat down between Train and Frankie.

'Well done,' Frankie whispered.

'You shouldn't be here,' I told him. 'They could summons you as a witness.'

'To say I signed on the dotted line?'

'And the rest,' I told him.

'They don't know the rest,' he whispered.

'Nor do I,' I said.

The whispered conversations in the prosecution camp came to an end and Stanfield announced to the court that he was ready to proceed with his opening speech.

He spoke relentlessly now, and I did not interrupt him again. Train took a note that was near verbatim. I made bullet points on my PC screen. At one stage I caught Frankie glancing over his shoulder at the dock behind us. He looked briefly at Santos. The accused man looked away.

My notes were broken, sketchy, breaking down the complex web of evidence in which my brother was somewhere trapped.

Jack Telfer, undercover cop working with Bill Sorensen.
Posing as financiers – interest: money laundering.
Contact with man calling himself Casas. Real name: Sebastian Santos
Identity verified by fingerprint from US.
Meet arranged on yacht. Hired by Santos's bank.
Meet went wrong. Sorensen attacked. Unconscious. Tied up. Escaped.
Saw Santos over Telfer's body. Struggled. Fled boat.
Fire on yacht. Flare. Rescue. Santos detained.
Arrested.
Lied about name. Gave name of Casas.
Lied in interview.
Confessed.
Confessed to murder. Torture. Telfer. To death.

The Boat of Horrors case. Tomorrow's headlines in every national newspaper. Not in this much detail, given the reporting restrictions imposed during committal proceedings. But as much as possible, pushing the limits of contempt of court in the name of the public interest, in the hope of selling newspapers.

I looked at my notes, with the cursor blinking after the word death. Scrolled back up the page. No mention of Frankie. For that at least I could be grateful. But my instincts as a lawyer, as an advocate, kept whispering in my ear that there was something wrong with this picture that the prosecution sought to present to the court. There was another explanation that no one dared give.

Hearing Stanfield lingering on the question of Santos's false identity, I moved closer to Frankie. 'Was Casas one of the identities in the aluminium case?' I asked him.

'So what?'

'Why *that* name?' I asked. 'He said it wasn't an official ID.'

'Maybe he didn't trust the witness programme names.'

'He never does anything without a reason.'

'Some sick reason,' Train added, still writing down what Stanfield was saying.

'OK, why?' Frankie asked.

'Don't know,' I said.

Stanfield finished his opening remarks by reminding the stipe of the very low threshold test that the case of Galbraith imposed upon the prosecution. He wiped his forehead with a white silk handkerchief, even though I could not see a single bead of sweat on his powder-dry skin.

'With your leave, I'll call my first witness,' he said. He turned towards Leybourne, who nodded back. Stanfield announced, 'Dr Cynthia Hardy.'

The usher at the entrance to the courtroom echoed, 'Dr Cynthia Hardy.'

I removed the bundle of post-mortem photographs from my pile of papers, steeling myself as I had to do each time to gaze once more upon Jack Telfer's tortured body.

'What're you saying?' Frankie asked.

I glimpsed Cynthia at the door to the courtroom, her black pilot's case in hand.

'Sebastian Santos to Sebastian Casas? He's toying with all of us. He's daring us. Casas isn't just a name,' I said. 'He told me you won't find it on any list. He said the name chose him – whatever that means.'

'So what is it?' Frankie asked.

'Don't know,' I said as Cynthia passed me. 'But I say we find out.'

# Chapter Thirty

Cynthia Hardy wore a bold burnt-orange two-piece, tapered and flattering at the waist, with a high collar and buttons right up to her chin. Her hair had been cut and styled since I had seen her in the mortuary, swept over dramatically to one side. Her eyes flitted around nervously as she passed me. She rounded the front of our row and headed towards the raised witness box on the left-hand side of the court. When she passed the prosecution ranks, she stopped. For a moment, I wondered if she had lost her nerve in the face of all the media jackals. She spun around and had the audacity, rare in a witness on so momentous a legal occasion, to address the stipe directly.

'Sir,' she said, 'I need to speak to the prosecutor.'

'Very well. But when are we going to get on with this case?' Jarrow said.

Cynthia went into a huddle with Stanfield and Mottram. Mottram hurriedly checked through a binder of case papers she had stowed away beneath the bench – not the core of the case, but one part of the ancillary clutter that a murder investigation produces with depressing ease. She couldn't find what she wanted, and all the while I could see Stanfield chiding her to hurry, glancing at the stipe nervously.

I ushered Frankie out of my way and headed towards Santos. The majority of the people in the well of the courtroom were

reporters, taking down details in shorthand with notebooks on their knees. I saw one of them with a hand-held tape recorder next to him. The cassette housing was empty, live recording of court proceedings other than the official transcript not being permitted.

A couple of hacks had laptops open. They were far more advanced machines than mine, with flat, glare-free screens. I passed another row and saw a court artist with chalks. He looked up as I walked by him, instinctively trying to conceal his artwork, as someone reading a newspaper on the Tube shields it from his prying neighbour. He was too late. I saw the drawing. Not of Jarrow or Stanfield or me. It was a less than flattering portrait of Sebastian Santos guarded within the dock. It didn't capture the alertness of Santos's eyes. The portrait would be sold to documentary makers, or syndicated for news agencies.

I reached the first of the public benches. There was a surprising number of women, a clear majority. One elderly woman with a wiry perm had some crocheting on the seat beside her; a younger woman had a sociology textbook with her. There were hangers-on, court junkies who spend most of their daylight hours in one courtroom or another in the metropolis. Law students, local traders, all of them here to see my client, wanting to learn how a police officer was tortured to death.

Santos had persuaded someone to provide him with a cushion, upon which he sat behind the metal grille at the front of the dock. As I drew near to him, I could faintly smell the jasmine from the sprig in his buttonhole. He glanced to either side of him as a sign that the jailers should not listen to the exchange with his lawyer. The larger jailer yawned widely, affecting total boredom. The second man, much smaller and hyperactive, immediately glanced down at the back page of the *Racing Post*, which he concealed from Martin Jarrow behind the front of the dock.

I moved as close as I dared, checked that Mottram and

Stanfield were still occupied with paperwork. 'Why use the name Casas?' I asked.

'Does it matter?'

'Not to anyone. Except me.'

'A rose by any other name, counsel. *Romeo and Juliet*, was it not? I always loved love stories. My wife hated them, said they portrayed the biggest lie, that love conquers all. She was right, I now see.'

'Answer my question.'

'I wish my family could be here.'

'Have they come to visit you?'

'They visit me every night.'

'What?'

'My family are dead,' he said. Then he leaned away from me, straightening his back.

'We're ready to swear the witness,' Stanfield told Jarrow.

'Please return to your place, Mr Kilkenny,' the stipe told me.

'One moment, please,' I said across the courtroom.

'Now,' the stipe insisted.

'How did they die?'

'I killed them,' he said.

'Mr Kilkenny, the court is waiting,' Jarrow said.

'I caused their deaths.' Santos took the stem of jasmine from his buttonhole and smelled the fine white petals. He refused to speak further.

Cynthia held the white plastic card in her hand and repeated the form of words sanctioned by the Oaths Act 1978 for those who did not or could not believe in God. She had probably seen more dead bodies than the rest of the courtroom combined. She had seen the end of life. How easily it could come. And still she did not have the consolation of a belief in the divine. She said, 'I do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm that the evidence I shall give shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.'

Stanfield gazed directly at her and even tried a small smile,

which had the effect of making his serious face appear more serious still. 'You are Dr Cynthia Hardy?' he asked.

'Yes,' she said.

'And your qualifications?'

Cynthia trotted them out as if the years of dedicated study she had put in were of no account to her. 'Doctor of medicine, doctor of science.'

Stanfield checked his copy of Cynthia's PM report. I checked mine also and saw why he was anxious to probe her further.

'You have other degrees, perhaps?' he asked.

'Yes, but they were honorary degrees. I didn't earn them in the same way,' Cynthia said.

Stanfield could not afford to allow Cynthia's self-effacement to diminish her status as his chief expert witness. It was important to him to establish her credentials in the eyes of the court. 'You have honorary degrees from Oxford, Edinburgh and Cambridge?'

'Yes.'

'Do you belong to any bodies?'

'Professional bodies? Yes,' she said. 'The Royal College of Pathologists.'

'Any others?'

'Not unless you count Greenpeace and a season ticket at White Hart Lane.'

There was a burst of laughter behind me.

'I didn't mean that,' Stanfield said.

'I didn't think you did,' Cynthia replied, relaxing a little.

'Do you have a particular field of specialism?'

'Forensic medicine – that is medicine that specifically relates to the law or medical jurisprudence.'

'That is a working definition of forensic medicine, I take it?'

'Well, the actual roots of the word forensic are, I think, Latin. From the Roman "forum", the marketplace in the Roman world where lawyers touted for customers. Even back then lawyers seemed to be looking around for work. *Plus ça change*, I suppose.'

Stanfield's lips curled with displeasure at this slight. 'And within forensic medicine, your favoured discipline?'

'Forensic pathology, obviously. The examination of the dead, or more accurately the pathology of trauma.'

'Why do you qualify your answer in that fashion?'

'The same scientific principles of injury, fracture and wounding apply to the living. The distinction between fatal and non-fatal trauma is a narrow one. The trauma line between life and death equally so.'

'I'll come back to that,' Stanfield said ominously.

A murmur rose around the courtroom.

'What's he doing?' Frankie whispered to me.

'Working the audience,' I replied. 'Could dive in now, but he's building the suspense.'

'Jesus, you lawyers,' he said.

'Shhh,' Train complained. 'You want me to write this shit down, or what?'

Stanfield asked Cynthia, 'Now, do I understand that within forensic medicine you have a particular area of expertise which was of significance in this particular case?'

'Yes,' Cynthia said.

'And that is?'

'Toxicology.'

'Which is?'

'In lay terms, poisons. In more esoteric language, and scientists love being esoteric, I'm afraid, the analysis of the symptomatology and diagnosis of toxic agents in the body. It is a very "hot" field.'

'In vogue?'

'Sexy is the buzz word,' Cynthia told him.

Stanfield shifted uncomfortably on his feet at the mention of the 'S' word. 'Hmm,' he said, and added, 'So the study of toxins was of benefit to you in this case?'

'The study of drugs,' Cynthia said.

'*Drugs?*' Stanfield echoed. 'I'll come back to that.'

Another burst of discussion went through the court.

'Be silent,' Jarrow said.

Stanfield continued, 'Your involvement with this case, Dr Hardy?'

'Being seconded to the Home Office Forensic Science Service, I was instructed by Her Majesty's Coroner to conduct a post-mortem on the deceased, one Jack Telfer.'

Stanfield paused.

No matter how case-hardened the tribunal might be, I knew that the photographs of the victim's body would have a profound effect on Jarrow. The photos still unsettled me. Stanfield was playing smart. He was getting in the prejudicial evidence first. Creating an instinctive feeling in Jarrow's subconscious that such an appalling crime could not be allowed to go unpunished. This was always one of the hardest parts of a murder case for the defence.

Stanfield did not overplay his hand. 'I believe you have some photographs.'

Cynthia produced bundles of photographs from her case.

'Those were taken of the deceased after death?' Stanfield asked her. He turned to me. 'Objection?'

'I'm not taking any continuity point,' I told Jarrow.

'That's very helpful,' the stipe told me.

I could have insisted that the actual photographer come to court to 'produce and prove' each photo, but there was little point in this case. It would just highlight the photographic evidence more vividly.

The usher handed bundles to Jarrow, the court clerk, and finally to me. The prosecution team were each armed with the photos already. I had seen them many times in my preparation for the case, so I let the bundle sit on the bench between Frankie and me. Looking again at the agony of Telfer's body conjured in me the same revulsion it would in anyone else, possibly more, since it was my duty to represent the man accused of this. I knew precisely what each photograph depicted, and in numerical order.

Photo 1: Establishing shot of Telfer's body in the main cabin of the yacht.
Photo 3: Standing at Telfer's burned feet, looking up the length of his body.
Photo 8: His face, the eyes looking upward to his arms above his head.
Photo 13: On the dissection-room slab, the naked body in left-hand profile.
Photo 19: The necklace of incineration around his neck.

Cynthia reeled off Jack Telfer's age, sex, race, height, body weight and the weight of his vital organs at the time of her post-mortem. She described in fine but fair detail each of the areas of trauma – the soles of the feet and the neck in particular. An incredulous stillness settled on the public gallery, as if Telfer were being dissected right in front them. If this case were sent upstairs for a jury of twelve ordinary citizens to try, I knew that Santos, whether truly guilty or innocent, would be dead in the water as soon as this evidence was led.

'You have seen the burning of human tissue before?' Stanfield asked.

'Victims of fires rather than suspicious death inquiries,' she replied. 'But occasionally in what turned out to be murder cases.'

Perhaps she saw me beginning to get to my feet in objection, and she held up her hand towards me in apology.

'I do apologise to Mr Kilkenny,' she said. 'I'm not seeking to prejudge this case.'

'Thank you,' I told her, though technically I shouldn't have spoken to a witness directly when not on my feet examining.

'You are excessively fair,' Stanfield said, clearly feeling her professional caution was unnecessary.

'Can you be excessively fair?' Cynthia asked.

Train whispered to me, 'Whose side is she on?'

'She doesn't take sides,' I replied.

Stanfield took a sip of water. 'Now, given that you've seen

burn injuries before, have you ever – in your professional experience – seen such a constellation of injuries?'

'Never this pattern,' she said. 'It's unique from my researches in the databases.'

'So if this man was murdered' – Stanfield looked at me – 'without prejudging anything about this defendant, this was a murder that was unique?'

'This was a new signature,' she said.

'Meaning?'

'As far as our records show, no one has ever been killed like this before,' she told the court.

This produced more noise in the room and I was not surprised. People glanced at Santos, but he sat calmly, appearing actively interested, the jasmine still in his buttonhole.

'Did you reach a conclusion as to cause of death?'

'I have to tell the court that cause of death is never a precise science.'

'But it is a science?'

'It is the application of principles of recognised scientific learning,' she said.

'And cause of death here? In your opinion? Doctor?'

Cynthia considered the final paragraphs of her PM report, as I had considered them many times in the period after it had been faxed to my office.

'I'm afraid I'm going to have to use the term "multi-factorial" as the cause of death,' she said.

'Can you isolate out the various factors?'

'Well, there were a number of contributing causes. A number of things that made death more likely. An element of asphyxia – it is difficult to breathe when the body is burning. Then there is the inhalation of hot gases, burning the interior of the air passages, poisoning from carbon monoxide, and the sheer shock of the prolonged pain of this ordeal. I'm sorry, I should say event, not ordeal.'

I didn't object; in my mind I was back in the dissection

room, Telfer's body on the table; his face no more than four feet from mine. I heard Santos's words: *Who am I to you? Who am I to you?*

'There was finally heart failure, but that is characteristic of death. His heart was otherwise healthy for a man of his age, the occlusion of the arteries well within the expected ranges. I can pretty much exclude heart disease as the cause of death.'

'So,' Stanfield said, waiting until there was complete silence in the court, 'he died of what was done to him?'

'Yes,' Cynthia replied.

Cynthia was professional and, unlike with many pathologists I had come across, I could see no mileage in questioning her findings. I had planned to ask a number of questions that would cast some doubt on her conclusions from the PM report, but hearing her testify, and combining that with my knowledge of the photos and the body in the mortuary, I changed my mind. The sole question was going to be whether the 'signature' of the killing pointed to Santos or not.

'One last point,' Stanfield said. 'Toxicology.'

'Yes?'

'You found traces of an unusual toxin in the bloodstream of the deceased?'

'Yes, I found traces of its constituent elements, lysergic acids and glucose derivatives, and others. It is a complex drug known as glycinol-2.'

'I don't want to go into the pharmacology of this drug for the purposes of today's hearing, but just tell us in short what its effect is thought to be.'

'It enhances consciousness.'

'I don't understand,' Stanfield said, even though he understood perfectly.

On my screen I tapped out: *Lysergic acids + glucose???*

This was new information. The report had just said glycinol-2, without identifying its constituents. Now these two elements, the acid and the glucose, rang a bell in my head. This was

familiar. Important. Something I had seen elsewhere in the case, though I could not remember where for the moment.

'Tell us in lay terms the effect this drug might have had during the events leading to the death of the deceased,' Stanfield asked.

'It would keep him conscious for longer,' Cynthia replied. 'He would endure the pain for longer. It could have kept pulling him back to life. That thin line I mentioned. It could blur that line. For a while.'

It was the perfect moment to end an examination, and Stanfield knew it.

He sat down, saying, 'Wait there, please, in case Mr Kilkenny has some questions.'

The courtroom was a pit of disgust and disbelief. These details had not been revealed in public before.

A policeman had been tortured.

He had been given drugs so that he would suffer the torturing for longer.

I stood, surrounded by hostility, my task to retrieve something from this. At such moments I hated the job. Dad was right. This lawyering was a dreadful business, and defence advocacy the worst of all. But Santos was sitting in the dock behind me, and could disclose things that would ruin Frankie's life.

'Dr Hardy,' I began, 'I think we can agree that this is a thoroughly disturbing case, and we have heard things today in this courtroom that perhaps no court in this land has ever heard.'

'We can agree that, Mr Kilkenny,' she replied.

Thank you, Cyn.

'It is my duty to ask you to elaborate some of these disturbing details, but I will do so as quickly as I can.'

'I understand,' she said.

I played for time. Acids, acids, glucose, glucose.

The hiatus that Cynthia had caused as she entered court. The heated last-minute discussions with Stanfield and Mottram.

I tried to make a connection. None came.

'Can we agree that the deliberate way in which this police officer was killed, and the use of this particular drug to prolong the agony of this terrible death, tend to suggest a motive for murder that was eminently *personal*?' I asked.

Stanfield was on his feet objecting. 'I must protest at this attempt to draw a psychological conclusion from pathological evidence.'

I could see not only that the public wanted an answer to this question, but that Jarrow required one also. I tried to find a loophole through which to squeeze out an answer.

I asked Cynthia, 'Have you in the past advised the Home Office as an expert on offender profiles based on pathological examinations?'

'Yes,' she said.

Found it.

'Then, unless there is further objection, I am going to ask you to share your expert opinion with us.'

'Expert evidence should be served in advance in accordance with Rule—'

I cut him off. 'She's your expert.'

Stanfield sank back to his seat, furious at the outmanoeuvring.

Cynthia answered, 'I would doubt that this is the random killing of a stranger by a sociopath. This has all the hallmarks of a deeply personal form of retribution, exacted with ice-cold deliberation.'

'Thank you.' I said. As soon as I said it, I wondered what I was really thankful for. Ice-cold and deliberate described Santos. But personal? What was this personal vengeance against Jack Telfer? I recalled the few points I had intended to make, rejecting most of them in my head, pausing at the only one that still had an ounce of merit. 'Traces of the deceased's skin were found under the fingernails of the defendant Santos?' I asked.

I saw Stanfield rise again to object. I decided to bypass him. I told Jarrow, 'I don't know why my learned friend wishes to

object to this, since it is his evidence and evidence that I will not dispute.'

Stanfield sat down again. I dug out the medical report of the forensic tests performed on Santos after his arrest. I scanned through the badly photocopied pages, almost illegibly black in places, found the record of the skin fragments.

'I didn't examine Mr Santos,' Cynthia said quite properly.

'But assume the deceased's skin was found under Santos's nails,' I told her. 'Then apply your extensive experience of victim and offender forensic profiles. Is there not a case for saying that such skin traces under the nails are consistent with fending off an attacker, and causing scratches on that attacker in defence?'

Jarrow took off his half-moon glasses and peered at me. 'Are you going on to suggest that it was your client who was in fact attacked by the deceased?'

I could hear the outrage mounting in the benches around me. But I had to be bold. 'I'm suggesting it is a possibility. If the doctor agrees.'

Jarrow turned to Cynthia.

'It's possible,' she said.

Disgust around the courtroom. Then, for an entirely different reason, my heart felt as though it had stopped.

I felt dizzy, my stomach empty and burning – because of what I had just spotted in Santos's medical report.

That nagging voice in my head.

It was caused by these details.

I looked around at Santos as he sat in the dock. I wondered if he knew. If he did, why hadn't he said anything? I had just come across one of the most powerful arguments for his innocence.

In my excitement, I grabbed Train's fountain pen from him. I scribbled on the report, ringing a few words several times before I handed my copy to the usher. 'Please show this to Dr Hardy,' I said.

'What the hell are you doing?' Train growled.

I gave him back his pen. Then I turned to Frankie. 'I don't know where this is leading,' I told him.

'Jesus,' he said.

Cynthia now had the report, and from her face I could see that she was as shocked as I had been.

'I haven't seen this report,' she said, flicking through the pages, trying to make sense of it.

'I am not criticising you,' I told her. 'Do you see that I have ringed some words?'

'Yes.'

'Tell the court what they are.'

She flicked over the pages, flicked back.

'Doctor? Please,' I said.

'Acids and glucose,' she said.

'The *same* breakdown of constituents of glycinol-2 in Santos's blood as in that of the deceased?'

'Yes.'

Stanfield shot to his feet. 'I object. This is utterly irrelevant.'

'Is it?' I asked. I turned to Cynthia Hardy again. 'Isn't it possible, Doctor, isn't it just possible that whoever drugged Jack Telfer also drugged Sebastian Santos?'

Stanfield objected even more strenuously, beside himself with rage, and Jarrow did not permit Cynthia to answer my question. But it did not matter.

There were traces of glycinol-2 in Santos's blood.

'Glycinol-2 is a rare drug?' I asked in the chaos.

'It's not readily available,' Cynthia replied, shocked by the noise around her, clutching the front of the witness box.

'Who is it available to?' I continued. Cynthia hesitated. Looked for guidance from Stanfield. I pressed home the question. 'Doctor, we have a right to know. Who?'

'Law enforcement agencies,' she said.

Then I realised that Santos knew about this all along and this was the reason for his letter. Had he been preparing the ground for this? It was as if there were already something in the air: leaflets, protesters, calls for an inquiry, the website, a chatroom. People talked about the case. They also worried about the NCS.

# Chapter Thirty-One

The public gallery erupted into disorder with my final salvo. Jarrow was experienced enough in the dynamics of a courtroom to know that this vitriol had to work its way out before we could safely continue.

'Who is your next witness?' he asked Stanfield in the noise.

'DI Ellen Ross,' he replied.

I had not seen Ellen all day; though she might have waited outside when the court was in session, being a live witness, I would have expected her to have liaised with the prosecution team in court beforehand. She had not been there.

'I'm afraid she isn't at court yet,' Stanfield said, his voice strained.

'Where is she?' I demanded.

Stanfield did not answer.

My thoughts shot to Bill Sorensen. Another cop, on the run, unavailable as a witness to the court. I glanced at Santos, the calmest man in the entire courtroom, sitting on his cushion in the dock. I saw Frankie's tired eyes – the emaciated, skeletal brother that had returned to me after New York and Sebastian Santos. Was Ellen being ruined by it all too?

'I'll adjourn pro tem,' Jarrow said, and swiftly left the courtroom.

'Where's Ellen?' I asked Mottram.

She looked at me nervously, seemed about to answer when Stanfield put his black-sleeved arm around her like a dark wing and ushered her away.

Train and Frankie were now on their feet on either side of me. Still the crowd around us argued. Reporters rushed out of court to file their story. How much of it they could use was open to question, but they would try to find a way.

An undercover cop. Tortured. Poisoned. By a drug available to law enforcement agencies.

We passed Santos, and his eyes lingered on my face to let me know that he was pleased. I took in the faces of the public, confused and stimulated. They had come to see a witch's trial. And now the witch hunters had been shown to have been practising some of the darker arts themselves. Maybe.

Glycinol-2, available to law enforcement agencies.

I sent Train and Frankie out of the courtroom and waylaid Santos in the dock before the jailers took him down.

'Your family. Talk,' I said.

'I am responsible for their deaths.'

'How?'

'Trust.'

'What do you mean?'

'I trusted the wrong kind of people.'

'What kind of people?'

'Live ones,' Santos said. He looked at me, and I sensed him fighting to conceal a number of conflicting emotions, as if this had been a terrible burden, and although he had not wanted to share it, there was some relief in finally disclosing his secret. 'I wish to rest downstairs now,' he said.

Out in the lobby of the court building, the city air blew the exposed front part of my shirt to my skin. I shivered. Frankie fell behind in the crush. I glanced at Train and indicated that he should keep going since he had the case notes and my laptop. He understood.

I spun around, my line of vision obliterated by two huge

uniformed officers. I couldn't see my brother. Had they finally arrested him? I jostled to my right for a view of where he had been. Frankie was being manhandled by a suited man with his back to me. One of the uniforms laid his rough hand on my arm. I shrugged him off. They knew who I was, and now I knew the identity of Frankie's assailant. Leybourne.

'Frankie!' I shouted.

His eyes were transfixed by Leybourne's. I pulled the detective away.

'You bloody know what happened,' Leybourne told Frankie.

'Leave him alone,' I said.

Leybourne stared into my eyes. 'And you're as bloody bad as your brother.'

'Why don't you go and catch Sorensen?' I told him.

Just about the worst thing I could have said; I knew it deep down. Leybourne was held back by the uniforms. He broke free and made for me.

My ring-craft came into play. I sized him up – feint right, hit him left if I had to.

But we were separated even as my fists clenched.

Ellen stood between us. 'What the hell are you doing?'

Her sudden presence shocked Leybourne out of his rage. I could see that he felt foolish; his gaze dropped to the floor.

'Dave?' she said, turning to me.

'Keep him away from my brother,' I told her.

'I can't believe you men,' she said.

She smoothed down the jacket sleeves of her blue grey suit, as if she had been throwing blows in the fight herself. She said quietly, 'Come on.' But she did not look at me or even at Leybourne when she said this. To her right stood Astrid Sorensen, dressed in black, her eyes red and sore.

I turned to Frankie. 'All right?' I asked. He nodded.

As we arrived in the advocates' room, I closed the door behind me. The excitement of the crowd ebbed away outside. The room was basic, well used, with worn old tables and low-

slung chairs. It smelled of all the cigarettes anxious advocates dragged on before cases. There were Styrofoam cups with dregs of coffee in one of the bins. We had the room to ourselves. The Boat of Horrors circus had resulted in all the other cases being moved. Train stood with us around the coffee table. There was a ring-stained copy of *The Lawyer* newspaper; someone had left a photocopy of an *NLJ* article on ballistics and rifling patterns. Train had placed my laptop half across this, along with his court notes.

'Leybourne's crazy,' Frankie said.

'I don't give a shit about Leybourne. It's you, Frankie. You always have to do things your way. For once, why don't you listen to me? This is my patch. These courts are my life. I know what happens here. You've probably just psyched Leybourne into pushing for your arrest – whether they've got evidence or not. He won't care now.'

'You would just love it. Big brother fucks up big-time. His whole life's on the line for murder. And little brother comes charging in to the rescue. You would *pay* to do a brief like that.'

'Is that what you think?'

'Tell me I'm wrong,' he said.

I looked hard at his face. Our eyes locked, seeing who was going to back down, just as we had always done. 'You're wrong,' I said.

'And you're a liar,' he said.

'I'm not the one who can't tell his brother the truth.'

'I ask you to do something for me. To do the case. And what do you do? You have to prove how brilliant you are. You have to try to win it. If it ruins me, well, sorry, that doesn't matter. Young David's going to prove he's the real star in the family.'

'You wanted me to do the case. You know what I'm like. Of course I was going to try to win it, for Christ's sake. Naturally you couldn't just tell me straight what was really going on. So no, Frankie, now I can't just throw it.'

'That crap about only law enforcement agencies having glycinol-2? What are you suggesting? That Santos is innocent?'

'OK, tell me he's guilty,' I demanded. 'Come on, Frankie, you tell me that you know for a cast-iron fact that Sebastian Santos murdered Telfer on that yacht.' He was momentarily silent. 'You can't, can you? Because how could you know for sure, unless you were on that boat, which you keep telling me you weren't.'

'You could get him out. Jesus, do you realise that?'

'I've represented men like Santos before. I've an idea what men like that are like. Santos will be more dangerous in prison than on the outside. Look, if he gets convicted, he's going to deal. He's going to offer them something. He could offer them you.'

Frankie's face tightened. He began fiddling with my PC, booting it up. The guardian screen demanded the password. 'What's the pass?' he asked me.

I slumped back into my seat and closed my eyes. 'Ruth,' I said.

He looked at me, surprised. 'Why that?'

'Easy to remember.'

He shook his head, typing in the four letters. As the software programes automatically came on-stream, he said, 'If a shark finds a feeding-ground, it doesn't just swim off after one kill. It stays until it's exhausted its food supply.'

'Brilliant, Jacques Cousteau,' I said.

'Santos won't just swim off,' he went on.

'So what do we do?'

'I went shark hunting off Barbuda once. All a bit illegal, but you know, if you've got the green. You know the best way to catch a shark?'

'Blow it out of the water. That's what Roy Scheider did at the end of *Jaws*.'

'I'm talking about catching one, not detonating it. To catch them, you put bait in the water, some blood.'

Frankie clicked the mouse on my keyboard, and took his cellular out of his pocket.

'What're you doing?'

'Tell me you're on the Internet,' he said.

'So what if I am?' I clicked up the correct screen, double-clicked the service provider icon.

'We're going to put some blood in the water.'

'How?'

'By finding out what Casas is all about.'

'I've checked the website. It's full of rubbish.'

'So what do you suggest?'

It came to me slowly, like the loading of an image on-screen, bar by bar, bit by bit of information. 'Something Santos said this morning.'

*. . . sometimes there's a little truth to be found on the Web.*

'It's like he's daring us. I say we search the Web itself, not the website. Check anything to do with Casas.'

The service provider's search engine came up, the cursor now flashing in the box. Frankie typed. C-A-S-A-S.

He clicked the cursor on the search icon.

At the top left-hand corner of the screen, the counter that marked out the percentage completion of the search task stayed at 0% for a while, then slowly began to move round.

1% – 3% – 4% – 7%.

We watched. Waited.

'What is Casas, anyway?' I asked.

'Means homes or houses in Spanish,' Train said.

'Sebastian Homes? I don't think so. Is it a place? The name of someone? A company. Some mythical character.'

'This will give us every single reference to Casas on the entire World Wide Web,' Frankie said. We sat hunched over the screen. Frankie's tone had changed, and I detected the hint of mischief in it, the way he spoke when he was on one of his scams. 'Fancy some side action on this?' he asked.

'You have got to be kidding,' I told him.

'Come on, you know I always had something going on the

side with your fights. This is a kind of fight, isn't it? A ton says you won't win the case.'

'He's betting on the verdict?' Train asked in disbelief.

'You secretly think that you can win this case. A ton says you won't.'

I looked at him and tried to work out where he was coming from with this latest game of dare. 'You want me to lose this, right?' I said.

'Right.'

'And you're betting with that.'

'The case goes my way, I double up.'

The counter clocked round to the nineties. It accelerated. Quickly passing through 93 – 94 – 97.

Just as it finally reached 100%, Frankie put his hand over the front of the screen. 'It's make your mind up time before we see what's behind the blue door, Bob.'

I realised that the scam was one he was playing on himself, pretending that the outcome of the case was just another gamble of his, something he could win or lose money on, so he could cope with the impending tension more readily.

'Does he stick or twist?' Frankie asked.

'I haven't got a thousand. If I had . . .'

Frankie took his hand away from the PC, saying, 'I'll stake you. We're playing for the star prize, ladies and gentlemen.' He scrolled down the side bar of the screen, getting rid of the advertising and sponsorship logos at the top of the search engine's home page. We reached the search results.

'A mere 2,753 hits,' Frankie said.

'Almost three thousand clues,' I said.

'Lot of work for some sucker to do,' Train added.

From the way Frankie and I looked at each other and then at Train, he immediately realised what he was going to have to do.

'No way,' he protested. 'I'm the note-taker in court.'

'Frankie can take over,' I said.

Train grabbed his notebooks from the table and held them tightly against his chest. 'Don't you trust me?' he asked.

'Sorry, Train, but I need you on this one.'

I glanced at the screen and saw in the first few hits another argument that just might make Train feel better.

'You trained in that gym in Spanish Harlem, didn't you? I remember you saying that those PR fighters were hard nuts and punched twice their weight. And the Cuban heavyweights, how it was like punching into concrete.'

'Yeah, yeah, yeah. Now what the hell're you on about?'

'Look at the screen,' I told him.

I watched his eyes carefully, how they slowly widened as he absorbed the information on the screen.

'I need your expertise,' I told him. 'You speak Spanish, don't you?'

'*Un poquito*,' he said. 'Man, those Hispanic crews were tough.'

Frankie read out the first entry on the screen for Casas. 'Casas de Aranjuez.'

Train shook his head. 'Houses for sale not far from Madrid.'

I read, '*Acapulco renta y venta de casas.*'

Train translated, 'For sale or rent in Acapulco. Now that's somewhere I'd rather be. *AAAA Casas de computador*,' he read. 'PC World, Spanish version.'

There was a sharp rapping on the door and Stanfield entered without being invited in. I stood in front of the screen, shielding it from him. Something had happened and he wanted to tell me personally. It couldn't be good.

'Ready for us?' I asked.

'Yes,' he said. Then, as if someone had whispered a joke into his ear, he smiled to himself and said, 'And no.'

'You're making an application?' I asked.

'Clever boy.'

'Don't patronise me, Stanfield. If you're making a PII application, then make it, but don't fuck around like this, because I'm not interested.'

'People warned me about you,' Stanfield said. 'What you're like in court. But I wanted to give you the benefit. They were right. You're just like what they say about your brother.' He added, 'So *nouveau*.'

'So you're making a PII application?' I asked, controlling my anger.

'I can't confirm or deny that,' he replied.

The idiotic games advocates play when matters of sensitive evidence arise. He had some new evidence of such a sensitive nature that not only could the public not hear what it was, but the opposing advocate could not be permitted to hear it either.

'I am obliged to tell you this. Ellen Ross was delayed for a good reason. She was contacted,' he said. 'By Bill Sorensen.'

My face gave me away, and I knew it since Stanfield smiled triumphantly when he saw my shock. He said nothing more and I closed the door after his departure.

'How can they keep us out?' Frankie asked.

'What about freedom of information?' Train added.

I shook my head. 'Not on this side of the Atlantic.'

'So they can just speak to the magistrate about the case, and we don't know anything about what they're saying?' Frankie asked.

'Ellen's spoken to Sorensen, and Sorensen's given her some information that is sensitive. So sensitive that the prosecution deem it prejudicial to the public interest to disclose.'

'What do you think it is?' Frankie asked.

Three prime candidates. National security, informant intelligence or on-going operational matters. My fears were that it was something that would ensnare Frankie. I didn't want to tell him this until I could flush out more.

'These things have a way of coming out,' I offered, attempting to sound confident.

'Ruth said she'd come down,' Frankie said.

'Why?' I asked.

'She's worried.'

'She's worried?' I repeated. 'I'm worried to death about all this, Frankie. Every time I think I've got a handle on it . . . Did you know Santos's family are dead?'

'I heard something. I'm not sure,' he replied.

'What?'

'Something horrible happened.'

# Chapter Thirty-Two

A narrow, badly lit corridor curled around the back of Court Number One. On the walls were oil paintings of notable Justices of the Peace and stipendiaries from the last hundred years. All men, in stiffly awkward poses, black backgrounds making their pink, fleshy faces loom in the darkness of the corridor.

The stipe wished to see me in private and detailed the usher to bring me to his chambers. We passed a room with an open door, the lights within burning brightly against the corridor's murk. I heard heated conversation, saw Susan Mottram and the CPS Senior Branch Prosecutor, and Leybourne. Leybourne kicked the door shut.

The usher opened the door to the stipe's chambers, and what first struck me was the light. Jarrow had brought in additional lights to supplement the standard issue green brass civil service reading lamps. He had lights in every corner of the room on small tables, a light on each side of his desk. After the corridor outside, I felt as if I'd walked out into the summer sun from a black tunnel.

A man languishing in the chair in front of Jarrow's desk turned around. It was Stanfield, comfortable and at ease, talking in private with the man who would decide my case.

'Ah, Kilkenny, do join the party,' Jarrow said in a friendly

tone that surprised me. 'I hope you don't mind me swapping gossip with James here.'

I'm Kilkenny. Stanfield is James. Surname, first name, defence and prosecution.

'Depends who you were gossiping about,' I replied.

'I told you he was a tease, Martin,' the prosecutor said.

'Oh, nothing sinister, Kilkenny,' Jarrow said. 'My old chambers up north were a kind of experimental annex of Stanfield's here.'

'An experiment that went wrong,' Stanfield said, which was the occasion for much laughter at an in-joke I didn't have a hope of understanding.

'You wanted to see us,' I said. 'Something about the case.'

'Sit down,' Jarrow said. 'We're all chaps together.'

'I'd prefer to stand,' I replied.

The private-club camaraderie. Private rooms, locked away from the scrutiny of the public. The place where deals were done, if not officially, then in fact, since American-style plea-bargaining was officially frowned upon in our jurisdiction. I noticed a number of framed photographs on the wall. They were of huge metal ships' hulls, like the carcasses of monstrous steel whales, with the tiny dots of men, hundreds of Jonahs – the hard, proud men who built the boats.

Jarrow followed my gaze. 'My father and his father worked in the Tees-side shipyards,' he said. 'Till they shut down Matthews Maitland, Banks Colewell and the rest. I hear you once had wet feet?'

'River Division for a while,' I said.

'Must be something,' he said, letting his received pronunciation slip for the first time that I could remember, 'seeing the sun rise on the water.'

'Sunset too,' I said. And the fog, and the snow, and the first quarter of the moon reflected in the black water in front of your patrol boat until the bow wave melts the still surface.

'My grandfather worked on the great liners,' Jarrow said, looking fondly at the photo to his left. 'Look at this, Kilkenny. This is the refitting of the *Rivonia*.'

I had to keep a distance. I had to get back to the case. I reminded myself that if he knew I was once on the river, he might also have heard unflattering stories about my departure from the force. 'Well, the age of the liner's been replaced by that of the superyacht,' I said.

Jarrow got up. 'I have received,' he said, nervously, 'certain information via the appropriate security channels which satisfies me that extra . . .' He searched for the word, looking at his family photographs. '. . . vigilance is required at court. I'm going to ask for an armed police presence.'

Security channels. Code. He'd been contacted by the organisation that now co-ordinated the fight against organised crime along with the NCS. He'd spoken to MI5.

'This prejudices my client,' I said.

Jarrow looked uncomfortable. He took off his half-moon glasses and looked at me with his distant eyes. 'I do want to share with you what I can, Kilkenny,' he said. 'What I can tell you is that intelligence suggests that your client has . . . well, certain links to the cartels.'

'That is prejudicial. You must decide the case solely on the facts, and yet you know this.'

'I haven't been told, and I don't wish to know, what those cartel links are. All I know is that he has in the past . . . assisted law enforcement agencies in anti-cartel operations, and this might now jeopardise his safety.' He smiled. 'I don't think I could hold that against him.'

'It should be me who complains about prejudice,' Stanfield said.

'Then why don't you?' I asked. He didn't answer. I knew, as he did, that the odds were so heavily stacked in his favour that he could afford one small thing to go against him, he could afford to appear magnanimous.

'Well, gentlemen, that's about it,' Jarrow said. 'There is your application, James.'

'His PII application,' I said, pushing for any scrap of extra information.

Stanfield stood up angrily. 'The court cannot confirm or deny that, Kilkenny.'

'Let's stop messing about, for goodness' sake,' Jarrow said. 'We're all big boys here. Of course Kilkenny will surmise that it's a PII, James. Let's introduce a modicum of common sense into this case, shall we?' He turned to me. 'We'll call you when we've finished.'

'Thank you,' I said. I felt that Jarrow had done as much as he could to assist me.

'If I rule against the prosecution,' he said, 'you might need some time, Kilkenny.'

I heard shuffling outside the door and then there was a knock. When Jarrow called them in, I saw Mottram, her counsel's notebook covered in ink-wet scribbling, and with her were both Ellen and Leybourne. Behind the detectives was the Branch Prosecutor, the group accompanied by two AFOs, their guns held barrel upward.

As I passed Ellen, I sensed that she wanted to say something to me; her eyes fell upon mine and were heavy and troubled. I wondered what Sorensen had revealed.

Ruth was waiting for me outside the restricted area, at the front of the crowd milling around the lobby. Her hair was pulled straight back into a ponytail; her face glowed healthily as it always seemed to do, irrespective of the vagaries of the London weather. She wore jeans and a pale blue cardigan coat.

'I went to the range last night,' she said. 'Needed time to think about what we're going to do. I couldn't believe it. My fade turned into a slice. Don't think I was transferring my weight properly or something.'

'Ruth.'

'I can't keep it inside any longer. I can't deny the truth.' She took my hand just before I saw the red-headed jailer gazing out from the courtroom doors. 'It's like this – pressure building up inside me.'

'I'm in the middle of a hearing.'

'We've got to talk. Tonight. Promise?'

'Yes.'

'I realised I don't need my father. Where has he been all my adult life? I don't need to find my family because you're all here. But we've got to be truthful with each other. Agreed?'

'OK.'

'All that stuff Dad gave me about wanting to see his daughter. You know what it was? It was a sell. I was stupid to believe it.'

She came with me to the advocates' room, and I did my best to tell her of the developments in the case, how we had decided to concentrate on Santos's false name. She offered to help Train search the Web.

'Let me see now,' Train said, 'the magistrate's asked you to join his lodge?'

'Worse,' I said. 'They think there might be a hit on Santos.'

'Someone's been reading my mind.'

'We've got a little time. I don't know how long. The evidence has got to be something to do with Sorensen.'

'Why do you say that?' Frankie asked.

'The timing. Why didn't they make the app. before? Why wait until Ellen came back on the scene? It's got to be Sorensen. PII can be public interest, but also national-security-based. Think who's investigating this case.'

'NCS,' Frankie said quickly, always the first boy in class with the answers.

'*National* Crime Squad,' Train said.

'Right,' I said, my excitement growing. 'Now Sorensen won't come in. He's meant to disappear into the new high-security

witness protection programme, run incidentally by an NCS division. Why not?'

'Because he murdered Telfer?' Train suggested.

'Then why make the video? Just run and be done with it. Or vanish, pretend Santos dumped your body overboard. No, there's something else.' I went on, 'Why doesn't a serving cop trust the NCS? What does he know about what goes on within it? Something that would damage the public interest and be harmful to national security.'

'What are you saying?' Frankie asked.

'Look what Santos has done. Written that letter about NCS misconduct. Why? The biggest threat to national security isn't Saddam or right-wing Russians or Republican splinter groups. It's organised crime. What if there was something rotten within the NCS? The agency supposedly taking the fight to organised crime.'

'But what?'

'That's what we've got to find out,' I said. 'How's the Internet search?'

'Nullo joy,' Frankie said.

Train pointed to the latest page they had scrolled on to the PC screen. 'Casas this, Casas that,' he said. 'Mainly time-share properties in the Costa del Crime.'

'Not Santos's style,' I said. 'Can't we refine the search?'

We eliminated some of the news groups and categories that contained references to Cases. We chose not to have any property references. It could have been a mistake, and we knew it. But the vast majority of hits on the search engine came from property websites.

I calculated that if Santos had chosen the name Casas because of a property reference then we would never find it buried in the hundreds of other references anyway. But if his choice of name had nothing to do with property whatsoever, then we had dramatically narrowed our field of search. We had cut down the number of hits to less than two hundred when an armed

officer came into the room. Behind him was the usher. She was intimidated and seemed suddenly very small and frightened next to the armed man.

'Court's ready for you, Mr Kilkenny,' she said in a broken voice.

'Any new evidence?' I asked her. Sometimes the prosecution handed statements to the ushers to be passed over to the defence while they stayed in conference in their war room.

The usher shook her head. 'They're calling Miss Ross,' she told me.

# Chapter Thirty-Three

Ellen walked into the silent courtroom with more confidence than she could have felt. I remembered making that walk, when you are the key witness in a hearing, and the whole of the assembled audience is waiting to dissect every word you have to say. I made it during the corruption inquiry. After it, I walked out of the force.

I felt the hot burning on my face of someone watching me. Santos acknowledged me with a little nod of his head. I brushed past Frankie just as Ellen reached our position in the courtroom, and she stopped momentarily, anticipating that I was going to speak to her. I sensed the static between us, the anticipation of the impending contest. Then I moved past her and towards Santos in the dock.

'What is it?' I asked him.

'Ruth's here,' he whispered innocently to me.

Ellen held the Bible upward with her right arm extended above her head, in the manner of old-fashioned police officers. 'I swear by almighty God,' she said in a strong voice, 'that the evidence I shall give shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.'

She handed the Bible back to the lady usher, and I asked Santos, 'How d'you know about Ruth?'

Santos glanced at the jailer next to him, and I recalled that the

huge man had been looking out from the courtroom when Ruth and I were together in the lobby. Then he had obviously conveyed this to Santos.

'The whole truth? I wonder,' Santos said, affecting to be puzzled by the very sight of Ellen.

'What?'

'Whether Miss Ross *dares* tell the whole truth.'

'Did you confess to her?'

'Would I do that?' he said in a voice sufficiently loud for the nearest members of the public to hear, even though they could not grasp the context.

'How did your family die?'

'I can understand why you ask me this,' Santos said. 'But let me ask you in return, when he thinks of your mother's death, what does your father do? Talk about her death – or talk about her life?'

'Are you quite ready, Mr Kilkenny?' Jarrow called out from the front of the courtroom.

'I loved my family, David,' Santos said.

I studied him and realised that he would tell me no more for the moment. Taking a deep breath, I said, 'Ready now,' to the stipe.

I had moved fractionally to leave the dock when Santos stood rapidly, causing a flurry of surprised muttering on the benches. He bobbed his head towards mine and half smiled, displaying his unnaturally white teeth.

He whispered in my ear, 'Rip out her throat.'

My eyes turned to Ellen, and I remembered the first time I had seen her, on that first day of training. I recalled how in a room full of idealistic young men and rather serious young women intent on giving themselves totally to upholding the Queen's peace and the laws of the land, she had stood out, had seemed apart from the rest of us, with her poise and conviction and steely determination to do better.

'Your name?' Stanfield asked.

'Detective Inspector Ellen Ross of the National Crime Squad.'

'I was going to ask your occupation, but I think you've adequately covered that point. What I do wish to ask you is whether you have any involvement with the death of DCI Telfer. Any *professional* involvement?'

'I am part of the multi-task force investigating the murder.'

Stanfield looked down at Mottram. She gave him a confirming nod and he continued. 'You were involved in the investigation right from the start?'

'As soon as NCS . . . learned about the burning yacht,' Ellen said, guardedly. This was not an area she was comfortable with – but I couldn't yet determine why.

'For what reason did you in particular join the investigation?' Stanfield asked.

I saw Ellen purse her lips, and I was sure I was right. Something was troubling her.

She answered, 'That's an operational matter.'

Stanfield was taken aback by the curtness of her response. An operational matter. The phrase used by the police as a catch-all, a cover, a smokescreen. The courts rarely enquired into operational matters. Use the magic formula and avoid awkward questions. I was not going to let it go so easily. I made a note.

*Ellen – operational matter – Leybourne DCI – Ellen DI?*

There was something there, but I couldn't be sure what it was.

Mottram was now in conversation with DCI Leybourne. It meant that the prosecution had no intention of calling Leybourne as a live witness at the committal. I made another note.

'Still,' Stanfield said with more bluster, 'the important thing is that you did become involved in the investigation.'

'Yes,' Ellen said.

'Well, I would like to ask you about something else, something that happened a little while after these events, at a time when the defendant Santos was on remand in prison.'

'I saw Santos while he was in prison on remand.'

'And what happened when you saw him?'

Ellen looked at the stipe, then at the dock, then finally at me. For just a second, I wondered if she was going to pull back, withdraw. In the pressure of the moment, she closed her eyelids for an instant, and I knew how that fleeting moment of privacy in the public glare could prolong itself in her mind, giving her time to draw upon what she needed to go through with her testimony – a thought, a word, an image; maybe the image of another police officer's tortured body cold on the mortuary slab.

'What did happen?' Stanfield asked.

'Santos confessed,' Ellen said.

The public benches erupted. They had not been prepared for this. The witch at the stake had made a confession. It was time to light the bonfire at his feet.

The clerk of the court called for silence, with little success. I watched Jarrow as he made a note. It seemed as if he wrote only one word before he precisely laid down his pen.

I knew what that one word must have been: *Confession*

I sensed the outrage coursing through the courtroom. The accused had confessed. Then why go through this farce, why this waste of time? What was the point? These were the dark moments of defending. The moments when you wish you could change sides. The hateful looks of the public burning into your face. How can you possibly defend *him*?

When he was certain that he had regained command of the courtroom, Stanfield asked, 'What did Santos confess to?'

Ellen's voice trembled now, as if she had been unnerved by the outcry her last words had caused.

'What, DI Ross?' Stanfield asked

'He confessed to torturing Jack Telfer to death on the boat,' Ellen said.

We waited for Stanfield's next question, and the next detail of my client's confession.

But none came.

Stanfield pulled his masterstroke.

He said in little more than a whisper, 'No more questions,' and sat down.

Suddenly it was my turn on my feet. Even when the worst evidence against you comes out, the shock of challenging it is softened by the numerous questions of clarification and amplification that your opponent asks before he is finished. Normally, he will milk the crucial evidence, coming at it from a dozen different angles, getting the surrounding detail, attempting to persuade the witness to repeat the deadly words again and again in different unobjectionable ways, each time hammering them into the subconscious of the tribunal.

My mind spun as I tried to work out what Stanfield was pulling.

'Mr Kilkenny?' I heard. The words seemed distant, like someone calling when you are asleep.

He confessed. No more questions.

Why?

'Mr Kilkenny,' Jarrow repeated.

This was a committal, a 6(1). The prosecution only had to show a prima facie case.

What was a prima facie case? It was not defined with precision in law. Some lawyers said it was something like fifty per cent certainty, others said twenty five per cent. But if beyond reasonable doubt was proof of guilt to ninety-nine per cent, then whatever the level of proof for a prima facie case, for enough to win the committal hearing, it was much less than that.

But why hadn't Stanfield brought out any of the details himself? What harm could it do his case? I suddenly realised. It wasn't a question of harming his case, but of harming mine. He knew I had to knock out Ellen's confession or the hearing was over. The only way I could do that was to probe into the details of the confession, and with every question I asked, with every clarification, I would bring out more and more damaging evidence against my case, more incriminating details against my client.

My attack on Ellen, my only hope, would be an attack upon myself.

'Mr *Kilkenny*,' Jarrow said. 'Do you have any questions of this witness or not?'

What alternative did I have?

'Just a few,' I said.

The most essential thing at the beginning of a hostile cross was to knock your target off balance. Where was Ellen weak?

'DI Ross,' I began, 'where is Detective Bill Sorensen?'

I saw Ellen's face grow pale. She blinked rapidly. She glanced towards the prosecution benches.

Stanfield was on his feet. 'I must object to this.'

'Must you?'

'This witness has made no reference to Detective Sorensen in her evidence.'

'Exactly,' I said. I turned back to Ellen. 'Why haven't you?'

'Sir, I repeat my objection,' Stanfield said.

Before Jarrow could respond, I said, 'How can he legitimately object? He might want to object. But he can't.'

'Relevance,' Stanfield protested.

'Yes,' I said, 'I see. Bill Sorensen was the other detective on the yacht when Jack Telfer was murdered. Bill Sorensen survived whatever did happen on the yacht. Bill Sorensen knows what happened and now is on the run and in hiding, so it must be totally irrelevant.'

'But we haven't sought *yet* to introduce the Sorensen video-tape into evidence,' Stanfield said.

I couldn't back down. I knew I had to pursue it fully, or go down all guns blazing. 'I *might* seek to introduce it into evidence,' I said. 'Myself.'

Stanfield's face clouded with astonishment. I knew my statement would shut him up. It bought me a little time, but I was making up my tactics as I went, walking through a minefield. I imagined myself stepping on the first mine. It hadn't gone off. Yet.

'What're you doing?' Frankie whispered.

I leaned down towards him. 'You wanted Santos to go down on this, didn't you?'

'Yes, but so obviously?' he said, concerned.

'There's nothing obvious about this case,' I told him, glancing round at Santos. My client was trying to control the emotions that must have been flooding through him, but I could see the anger in his eyes. He felt I was betraying him.

I had a plan. A long shot. A gamble of great risk.

Ellen's neat red hair now clashed with the glowing pink of her burning cheeks. She crossed her arms defensively.

'I will repeat my question,' I said. 'Where is Bill Sorensen?'

'I cannot say,' she answered.

'No, you will not say. But you know, don't you?' Ellen was silent, and I decided to attack from another direction. 'He contacted you today, didn't he?'

'Yes,' she conceded, knowing that Stanfield would have conveyed this to me.

'Are you saying that he contacted you, and you, as a diligent, intelligent detective, did not even bother to ask this witness to a fellow officer's murder where he is on the day of the murder committal?'

Stanfield was on his feet again. 'She's not saying that.'

'She's not saying anything,' I cut him off. 'But the question is, why not?' I looked at Ellen and she remained silent. 'Tell you what, I'll come back to that,' I said.

I glanced at my computer screen and saw the note I had made of Ellen's discomfort at the outset of her testimony: *Operational matters.*

'I seem to recall – and I'm sure Mr Stanfield will correct me if I'm wrong – I seem to recall that you wouldn't tell us why you joined this operation, merely saying it was an operational matter. Now, you know and I know that "operational matter" is a bit of a smokescreen, isn't it, DI Ross?'

'You're wrong,' Ellen said.

'Let's see what I'm right about, then,' I replied. I glanced quickly over to Leybourne's seat to ensure that he was still in court. 'The officer sitting with the prosecuting lawyers is DCI Leybourne. And he also is involved in the investigation?'

'Yes.'

'In fact, he was involved before you?'

'Yes.'

'He got the "squeal", the notification of the crime, before you.'

'So?'

'Well, I'm confused,' I said, which was true. But I was confused for a reason entirely different to the one I was about to reveal to the court, for I already knew the answer to my next question. 'You see, you're a DI, which is, of course, a senior rank. But he is a DCI. He outranks you. Yet it's you who is testifying.'

'I was the one Santos confessed to.'

'Exactly,' I said. 'You went to the prison alone. You went, not your senior officer. Why you, *DI* Ross?'

Ellen thought, then gave the answer I expected. 'DCI Leybourne is only on secondment to the National Crime Squad.'

'I see. Only senior in rank, not senior in fact,' I said.

Ellen was embarrassed and remained silent. Leybourne turned towards Stanfield, and I knew he was demanding that he object, but Stanfield shook his head. He was right.

'So what was the operational reason why you in particular, out of all the numerous highly trained officers of the NCS, became involved in this murder investigation?'

'It's an operational reason.'

'Which means you are not prepared to say, owing to on-going enquiries or the safety of operatives?'

Ellen was silent.

'You've pursued that as far as I'm prepared to allow you,' Jarrow told me.

'Very well,' I said. 'Let me try something else.' What, what? I

asked myself. Come on, keep punching, keep the pressure on. 'You went alone to see Santos in prison?'

'Yes,' Ellen said.

'That's not standard procedure.'

'Depends,' she answered.

'Come on, it means that if he does say anything incriminating, there is no other officer to corroborate it.'

'It's a risk. It becomes a question of his word against mine.' She turned and looked directly at Jarrow. 'It's a question of who a court will believe. Me or your client.'

Ellen against Santos? No contest. Even as this doubt infected my thinking, I kept struggling with the idea that Ellen, out of all the cops in the NCS, had got involved in this murder inquiry. It couldn't have been pure chance. Either they had wanted her, or she had wanted it.

'Next question,' Jarrow said, his impatience growing.

I needed to show him I was deadly serious. I played another of my trumps. Something that continued to puzzle me. 'You were not asked by Santos to visit him?'

'No,' she said.

'So you just turned up uninvited?'

'Yes.'

'And he just *happened* to agree to see you without his lawyer.'

'He did agree.'

'And this day of your totally random visit just *happened* to be the precise date upon which this man, who has continually denied any involvement in this crime, was prepared to confess to murder?'

There was an uneasy muttering around the courtroom.

'Yes,' Ellen said, but more quietly.

I was not convinced by her answer. Santos had never even told me about the fact that he had ingested the same toxins as Telfer, the glycinol-2 components. The timing of the confession had to be crucial. False confessions were fabricated when other avenues of investigation open to the police had failed.

I decided to risk everything, to go for total destruction of Ellen's testimony.

'By the time you say Santos confessed to you, isn't it true that the police were convinced that Bill Sorensen would not appear in court to testify against him?'

'I can't answer that.'

'Then answer this. When you went to that prison, *you* were convinced in your own mind that Bill Sorensen would not appear at the committal to testify, weren't you?'

'So?'

'So in your mind there was a gaping hole at the heart of the case and you went to see Santos, and suddenly that hole was filled.'

'It didn't happen like that.'

'Let's examine the chronology. Sorensen was in hiding?'

'Yes.'

'There was a gap in the case?'

'Maybe.'

'The committal hearing was imminent?'

'Yes.'

'You went to see Santos?'

'Yes.'

'The gap is filled by his confession.'

Ellen was silent for a while. I recalled the training we had been given: when cornered by a string of leading questions by defence counsel, try not to just parrot yes and no answers; repeat the meat of your testimony.

'He confessed to murdering Jack Telfer,' Ellen protested.

'But why did you go to see Santos? In interview, he had never made any admissions. It was going to be a waste of time, wasn't it?'

'I took a chance.'

'But why should you take that chance?'

'Because I was one of the investigating officers.'

'But why you out of all the investigating officers? Why you, DI Ross? Why?'

'Because I wasn't going to sit back and let a fellow officer's murder go unavenged.'

No sooner had she said it than she realised she had made a mistake.

There was a gasp around the courtroom. People must have felt for her in the way I did. They asked themselves the same question I asked. Would I have done it too? I realised what I was alleging. Ellen had fabricated a confession quite deliberately to try to get a man convicted of murder. She was the most strait-laced, by-the-book recruit I knew. She was utterly honest. But little by little she had become disillusioned with the force. I remembered our exchange on the steps of the NCS building when I'd asked about her and Jack Telfer.

*It's more personal than you can possibly imagine.*

'This is about vengeance, isn't it?' I said.

'No,' she responded, a tremulous note in her voice.

'Well, then, I'm going to have to take you through the detail of this supposed confession.'

Jarrow interrupted, 'I thought you had just a few questions.'

'That depends on your definition of a few,' I replied.

'What's yours, Mr Kilkenny?'

'It just changed,' I said.

# Chapter Thirty-Four

'DI Ross,' I said, 'as a serving police officer you are bound by the codes of conduct created by the Police and Criminal Evidence Act?'

'Yes.'

'In fact, breaching those PACE provisions that govern the conduct of the police amounts to a disciplinary offence?'

'Yes,' Ellen replied.

'So did you strictly obey all the provisions of Code C, the code that governs the detention, treatment and questioning of persons by police officers?'

'I never deliberately break Code C,' she said. 'But as you should know, policing isn't just about footnotes in law books.'

I hesitated for a moment, and felt admiration welling inside me. It was a particularly clever answer. It anticipated my next question, without giving me any more rope to hang her with.

'Let's see what you in fact did,' I said. 'Are you aware that although the code is principally aimed at the treatment of prisoners at and after arrest, by the case of Christou and Wright it applies beyond detention in police stations?'

'I know that principle of law, not the name of the case.'

Stanfield was on his feet again. 'This is not a legal tutorial, sir.'

'No, it's a murder committal,' I replied. 'And I want to

establish whether the law of the land has been upheld by those with the duty to uphold it.'

'This is not a Section 78 admissibility argument, Mr Kilkenny?' Jarrow asked, taking off his half-moon glasses.

'No,' I replied, 'since I'm sure that Mr Stanfield is as aware as I am that I cannot argue for exclusion of this officer's evidence. But the code is admissible into evidence with a view to assessing credibility of a witness, as Mr Stanfield should know.'

'Of course I know this,' Stanfield said.

'Then you have no reason to object to my questioning,' I retorted.

The prosecutor sat down, disgruntled.

Jarrow leaned forward conspiratorially towards me, as if he wished to speak to me directly without Ellen hearing. He lowered his voice. 'You realise that to succeed you must entirely destroy the credibility of this witness?'

I looked at Ellen, waiting for me to strike out at her again, then down at Frankie, with his increasingly troubled face. He desperately wanted me to stop. I turned back to Jarrow. 'I understand,' I said.

'Continue,' he said.

Ellen had never let me down, never cheated on me; she had wanted to continue our relationship. I silently asked her to forgive me for what I had to do. 'Are you aware of C11.4?' I asked.

'I'm aware of all the provisions of Code C, but not necessarily their numbers.'

' "As soon as a police officer who is making enquiries of any person about an offence believes that a prosecution should be brought against him and that there is sufficient evidence for it to succeed, he shall ask the person if he has anything further to say. If the person indicates that he has nothing more to say the officer shall without delay cease to question him about that offence." ' I paused, watching Jarrow's pen as he made a note of the germane words of C11 4. It was basic court-craft: when you want the tribunal to remember your point, be guided for tempo by their

note taking. When Jarrow's pen stopped moving, I said to Ellen, 'Does that ring any bells?'

'Yes.'

'It's one of the most important safeguards Parliament has laid down concerning a citizen's rights when being questioned by the police, isn't it?'

'Yes.'

'It's there to protect us all, isn't it?'

'Yes.'

'Even,' I added, pushing my luck, 'police officers charged with criminal offences.'

'I suppose so,' Ellen replied.

'I want to break it down into stages.'

My tactics: bite-sized chunks for the tribunal, soundbite justice, and simple yes/no answers for the witness. It was called 'riveting' the witness – I had to nail Ellen to a position and attack from there.

'At the end of Santos's interview in the police station, he was charged with murder?'

'Yes.'

'That was because you and your colleagues felt you had enough evidence against him for a murder prosecution to succeed?'

'Yes.'

'In fact, if you didn't believe that you had enough evidence at that stage for a murder charge to stick, your duty under the law would have been to delay charging him until you found that extra evidence?'

'Yes, of course.'

'So by the time Santos made his first appearance in this court after charge, you and your colleagues still believed that a prosecution should be brought against him for murder and that there was sufficient evidence for it to succeed?'

Ellen was about to agree when Stanfield rose in objection. 'This witness has answered this in about three different ways. Is there some point to Mr Kilkenny's questions?'

'I confess to reaching the same conclusion,' Jarrow said.

An objection. A judicial reprimand. It couldn't have been better. It was a perfect set-up for me. I told myself not to blow it. Take a breath. Focus. Go.

'Maybe it's just my mistake,' I said in a deliberately vague voice, 'but hasn't the witness just admitted to a flagrant breach of C11.4?'

'She's done nothing of the sort,' Stanfield said.

'I don't see how,' Jarrow added.

Away with the vagueness; now icy certainty. 'Let's reconsider the provision.' I glanced at Ellen, and her eyes could not hold mine. I think she knew. I credited her with being ahead of the game, but if I'd done my job correctly there was no way out. 'You understand the real point of 11.4, don't you, DI Ross?'

'Yes.'

'It's to ensure that an officer shall – and I quote – "without delay cease to question him about that offence". That's it, isn't it?'

'Yes.'

'Once he is charged, no more questions?'

'Yes.'

'He was charged?'

'Yes.'

'Yet you went and questioned him again?' Ellen hesitated, and I repeated my words.

'Yes.'

'So there are only two possibilities, aren't there?'

'What are they?' she asked, even though I was convinced she already knew.

'Either you deliberately breached 11.4 or you no longer believed that there was sufficient evidence for a prosecution to succeed. Which is it?'

Ellen was silent. I was aware that below me Frankie had stopped writing. I sensed no movement in the ranks of the public.

'One thing had changed from the moment Santos was charged until your visit to the prison. You became convinced as the committal date approached that Sorensen was not coming in. True?'

'Yes.'

'Why has this serving police officer not come in, DI Ross?'

'I object,' Stanfield said, even before he got up.

'Tell you what, I'll come back to that,' I said 'Sorensen had not come in, and as an experienced detective, aware of the evidence that remained against Santos, you realised that it was not enough.'

'I'm not commenting on that.'

'Allow me to do it for you by this question. Did you think you had enough evidence for a prosecution to succeed against Santos without Sorensen?'

Stanfield leaped to his feet. 'This question is impermissible, calling for an opinion.'

'He's quite wrong,' I told Jarrow. 'It calls for the witness's state of mind when she went to speak to my client in prison. I submit it's crucial.' I gambled. 'This is crucial to the entire authenticity of the alleged confession. This provides a motive for its fabrication. But if I'm wrong, I'll sit down right now.'

'I still object,' Stanfield said. 'Most strenuously,' he added, seeing that Jarrow was deep in thought.

Jarrow took a deep breath and momentarily closed his eyes. If he ruled against me, the case was over. He blinked. 'I'll allow the question.'

I felt a microscopic shift in the dynamics of the case.

'I'll repeat the question,' I told Ellen. 'When you went to see Santos in prison, did you think you had enough evidence for a murder prosecution to succeed without Sorensen?'

Ellen's face tightened.

'DI Ross? Yes or no?'

'No,' she finally said.

Frankie put down the pen. Stanfield, Mottram and Leybourne went into conference.

Where was I now? You've established motive for fabrication, I told myself. And why? Because Ellen has told the truth, just as you secretly knew she would. You've discredited her by playing on the weakness you knew she had – her honesty. My thrill at achieving my first objective was tempered by my disgust at what I was doing.

I remembered another time when honesty in a hearing had been a weakness. I remembered how I felt after telling the truth in the inquiry and then being treated like a leper; how the truth was punished. I wanted to give something back to Ellen.

'I'm sure the court commends your candid answer,' I said to her.

She did not reply. Perhaps she knew, as did I, that this was only the first nail. There would be more.

'So when you went to the prison to see Santos, you believed that you needed some kind of admission to keep the case against him alive?'

'I can't say I thought that exactly.'

'What else could you have been thinking about? What else was there to ask him?'

'About five hundred million dollars of laundered money,' Ellen said, fighting back.

I had made a mistake. I'd been too loose in my questioning in the excitement of the chase. I tried to retaliate. 'But Santos isn't charged with any trafficking or laundering offences.'

'No.'

'So let's go back to the murder. Did you think this: if he sees me, I hope he does confess?'

'Yes.'

'And he did happen to confess?'

'Yes.'

'Even after he had constantly denied everything.'

'Yes.'

I paused, looked around the courtroom. 'Well, why?'

'Why what?'

'Why did he suddenly confess?'

'I don't know.'

'Did you ask him?'

'No.'

'Weren't you interested?'

'Yes.'

'So why didn't you ask him about this staggering change of heart?'

'I don't know,' Ellen said quietly.

Stanfield broke off his whispered conversation with Leybourne. 'Is Mr Kilkenny positively putting to the witness that this confession has been fabricated?'

I looked at Stanfield and said, 'I'll come back to that.' Turning to Ellen, I asked, 'Did you make a record of the confession at the time?'

'No.'

'By C11.5c, an accurate record must be made during the course of the interview.'

'Unless in the investigating officer's view it would not be practicable. I didn't think it was practicable,' Ellen said, attempting to fight back.

'But here Santos was finally co-operating. Why couldn't you have made a record of his answers?' To this, she had no reply. I added, 'Did you ask if you could make a note?'

'No.'

'What stopped you?'

'He wanted it off the record.'

'And you agreed?'

'Yes.'

'Did you tell him that there is no such thing as an off-the-record interview with the police known to English law?' I saw Ellen pause; anger flashed quickly across her face. This was a trap I'd led her into which she had not anticipated. 'Did you tell him this?'

'No.' She was angrier still now.

'So if he believed it was off the record and you knew there was no such thing, you perpetrated a fraud upon him.'

'I strenuously object,' Stanfield said.

'You didn't clear up his misconception when you easily could have?'

'I didn't,' she said.

'You didn't make a written statement immediately after the alleged confession?'

'No.'

'When did you in fact make a statement?' She paused, and I put to her, 'It was on the very eve of this committal, wasn't it?'

'Yes.'

'A record of an interview should be shown to the interviewee for his agreement or dissent?'

'Yes.'

'Did you take any steps to show your statement to Santos?'

'No.'

'Did anything stop you from doing so this morning?'

'I was contacted by Bill Sorensen.'

'What did Sorensen say?'

'I object,' Stanfield said.

'Bill Sorensen said, "I object?" DI Ross?'

'No, I object to you,' Stanfield said, his patience worn.

'So what did Bill Sorensen say?' I demanded.

'I refuse to answer,' Ellen said.

Jarrow leaned forward and I expected a tirade against me, but he said, 'Mr Kilkenny, you should know that I have ruled on this point in . . . in private.'

The PII application. My instincts were right. It was about Sorensen. My brain raced. Come on – think. There had to be a way around the embargo on questioning that Stanfield had convinced Jarrow to impose in my absence. Appeal to his ambitions.

'Any judge has a duty to keep all matters of Public Interest

Immunity under constant and urgent review,' I said, playing to Jarrow's dreams of a seat on the High Court bench. Now play on his guilt. 'I accept that I'm cross-examining in the dark, but this is a public hearing and the public has a right to hear all legitimate questions save in exceptional circumstances. A judge of law also has to bear that in mind as the arbiter of fairness.'

'I agree,' Jarrow said.

'May I put what I can? I will of course stop if I overstep the mark.'

Stanfield was furious. 'This area is off limits.'

'You can't gag the truth,' I retorted.

Jarrow took off his glasses and wiped his brow.

'Proceed with the utmost caution, Mr Kilkenny,' he said.

I knew that my next target had to be Bill Sorensen, and in his absence I had to try to get him through Ellen. I was beginning to tire as well, and felt the onset of a fuzziness at the back of my mind.

'Without disclosing anything about where Bill Sorensen is now,' I said to Ellen, 'can we agree that he is not in witness protection?'

She glanced at Jarrow, and he nodded. She was allowed to answer this. 'He's not.'

'And the new highest-security branch of the witness protection programme is run by the NCS?'

'Yes.'

'But Sorensen refuses to come into it.'

'Correct.'

'A police officer refuses the protection of the police?'

'So it seems.'

I held my breath and then said, 'Something's rotten in the NCS, and Bill Sorensen knows it?'

The explosion came. From Stanfield, as I thought. From the outcry in the public gallery, from the admonition by Jarrow that I'd overstepped the mark. But also from Frankie.

*'Jesus!'* he said.

I reached down to the bench in front of me and pulled two documents out of my case papers. Firstly, the copy of Ellen's statement about the confession. Then the transcript of what Sorensen had said on the videotape. I handed a copy of each to the usher to give to Ellen.

'I'm not going to beat around the bush,' I said. 'The Sorensen videotape, which has not been entered into evidence, and I shall have a lot to say about that later, has been transcribed?'

'Yes.'

'In summary, Sorensen said Santos murdered Jack Telfer.'

'Yes.'

'He gives details about what happened on the yacht.'

'Yes.'

'And now he's disappeared?'

Ellen looked at Stanfield, then at Jarrow, who nodded. 'Yes,' she said.

I had to take my greatest risk now. Effectively, allowing Sorensen's tape in through the back door of Ellen's testimony. If the prosecution had tried to do this, I could have objected on the grounds that it would have been prejudicial to my case. But to destroy the remnants of Ellen's evidence, I had to take the risk.

'I'm looking at your statement of Santos's confession and comparing it with the transcript of the Sorensen tape. There's something strange here, isn't there?'

'No.'

'Look again, DI Ross,' I said. 'There are a number of details as to what happened on the yacht contained in Sorensen's version, and also in your account of Santos's confession.'

'You would expect that,' Ellen said.

'But would you expect this?' I responded quickly. 'Look carefully. Now tell the court. Is there a single detail in your Santos confession that is not to be found in the Sorensen tape?'

Ellen flicked through the two versions, turning page after page. To my left, Stanfield and his team dug out their copies.

'I'm going to come at it this way,' I said. 'Can you find a

single detail in your account of Santos's supposed confession that is not somewhere in Sorensen's tape?'

Ellen did not reply. Stanfield and Mottram and Leybourne scanned hastily through the pages.

'I'm going to suggest that there is not one detail that differs,' I said. 'And I'm going to put it another way. Someone fabricating a confession by Santos in the terms you say he used could have obtained every single detail of his supposed confession from the text of Sorensen's tape, couldn't they?'

Ellen was silent.

'There's not one difference, is there?'

'I can't find any,' she said quietly.

'Let me put it another way. In your experience as a detective, you know that two people witnessing the same incident will almost always see it in a slightly differing way, noticing different details, describing the same detail in a different way.'

'Yes.'

'Didn't it strike you as remarkable that when Santos supposedly confessed to you he did so by parroting Sorensen's account?'

'No.' Ellen tried to ride it out, as we had been taught to do. Repeat the damaging evidence in the face of defence counsel's attack. 'Santos confessed.'

'Come on, in identical terms to the Sorensen tape?'

'Yes.'

'OK. Did you ask for any extra detail from him?' I saw her pause; I could virtually see the mental calculations written across her face. She would have liked to have said yes, but where was the evidence of it in her statement? She was silent, so I pressed her. 'Put another way, when Santos gave a detail as to the murder, did you ever – once – ask him to clarify or explain or repeat or restate it?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'I don't know.'

'I do,' I said.

Stanfield demanded, 'If he's alleging fabrication, let him spit it out.'

'I'll come back to that,' I said, knowing it would drive him spare. I was right. 'Now, DI Ross, I want to ask you one last thing about this confession. Then I want to suggest to you the truth of what has happened here. First, the question.'

I could feel it forming in my mind in a dozen different sentences. I struggled with myself to find the right one. I would probably only get one shot at it.

God, don't blow it, don't blow it now.

I sensed my hand beginning to shake as I held the two documents in it. I put them down. Looked right at Ellen.

'DI Ross, this last point about the confession.'

'Yes.'

'Did Santos say *why* he killed Detective Jack Telfer?'

The look of surprise that raced across Ellen's face, the sudden widening of her eyes, told me that she hadn't seen this coming either.

'Why did Santos kill that officer?' I asked.

'He . . . he didn't say,' Ellen said.

'Of course, you asked.'

'No.'

'Wait. You must have forgotten. You can't seriously be telling the court that right before you a man has just confessed to murdering a fellow police officer and you don't ask him why he did it. You can't be saying that.'

'I am saying that.'

'You didn't ask him what his motive was once?'

'No.'

'But he was confessing. He was co-operating. Why didn't you ask him why he had tortured a colleague of yours to death?'

'I . . . I don't—'

'Did anything prevent you from asking him why he had done it?'

'No.'

'Did he appear reluctant to say why he had done it?'

'No.'

'So why *didn't* you ask?' I shouted.

Ellen was silent for a while. I saw her eyes beginning to water, but no tears fell.

'Why not, DI Ross?'

'I don't know,' she whispered.

'I do.' I said. 'Because Santos's supposed motive isn't in the Sorensen tape, is it?'

'No.'

Stanfield protested, 'Are you saying this senior officer has behaved illegally?'

'Now I'll come to it,' I said, staring hard at my opponent. 'I'm saying she's trying to do her duty. To do her job. To ensure that the man who she believes – however wrongly – was responsible for the brutal murder of a fellow officer is brought to justice. I'm saying that others failed her, the evidence failed her, the law failed her, but she was not going to fail Jack Telfer. She wanted justice for Jack Telfer. That's what you wanted for him, wasn't it, DI Ross?'

'Yes. No,' she said, totally lost.

'She believes Santos is a murderer. She believes Santos murdered Telfer, and she wasn't going to let Santos walk away from the crime she believed he committed against a fellow officer. And let me tell you, Mr Stanfield, that outside the walls of this courtroom, I would not criticise her for one moment. I don't think anyone who hasn't had a colleague killed on active duty has the slightest right to criticise her – outside the walls of this courtroom. But within these walls, it is my duty to challenge her. Whether I really want to or not,' I added, looking down at Frankie.

'I'm not here to prove Santos's innocence. I'm not here to prove who really did murder Jack Telfer. That's your job. But I'm going to help you do it.' I grabbed the tape that lay within

my papers. I handed it to the usher and asked her to play it in the court's tape equipment. 'Unless the prosecution has any further objection to prosecution evidence from the case.'

'You'll be able to prove the provenance of this tape, Mr Kilkenny?' Jarrow asked me.

'I think this witness will,' I told him.

I had primed it to the precise point I wanted, should I need it. The static on the tape crackled. And then the court heard the intimate conversation between a man and a woman that Train and I had first heard on the *Corinth*.

Hearing her own voice and that of her dead lover, Astrid Sorensen burst into tears and rushed out of Court Number One.

I nodded to the usher. She stopped the tape.

'Who is the Jack speaking on the tape?' I asked Ellen.

'Jack Telfer.'

'And the woman Astrid? What is her surname?'

'Sorensen,' Ellen said.

'You've heard this tape before?'

'Yes.'

Stanfield was on his feet. 'I haven't. So I don't know how Mr Kilkenny comes to have it in his possession.'

'That's not relevant for now,' Jarrow scolded him. 'What is your point, Mr Kilkenny?'

'A tape cassette with a recording of that intimate conversation between Jack Telfer and Bill Sorensen's wife was on the yacht, just feet away from where Jack Telfer's body was found?'

'Yes,' Ellen said.

'The tape suggests an affair between Telfer and Sorensen's wife?'

'That's what it suggests.'

'And immediately after Telfer's death, Bill Sorensen disappeared?'

'Yes.'

'And refuses to come in?'

'Yes.'

'And it seems that Santos and Telfer both had trace elements of the same toxic drug in their systems?'

'So I understand.'

'A drug available to law enforcement agencies.'

'So I understand.'

'But we can't determine whether law enforcement officer Bill Sorensen was similarly poisoned or not, since he has disappeared.'

'Yes.'

'There is one last matter about Bill Sorensen I wish to raise with you.' I tried to recall the details of the rumours my client Ratman had told me. 'Isn't it correct that he is under investigation for several serious criminal offences, including perjury and perverting the course of justice?'

'Yes,' Ellen said.

'These are mere allegations,' Stanfield tried to protest, 'unproven by evidence.'

'Exactly like the allegations against my client,' I said, turning on him.

There was complete silence in court as I sat down, and I knew – at least, at that moment I thought – that all that remained were the final legal submissions.

# Chapter Thirty-Five

Jarrow called for a five-minute adjournment. Long strings of people coiled along the aisles towards the narrow courtroom doors, and at the front of them, just disappearing from my view, were Frankie and Ruth. Ellen cast a forlorn look towards me as she was whisked away by Leybourne. If I expected hatred as payment for the ordeal I had subjected her to, I was wrong. I thought I even saw understanding as she looked back at me.

Santos had either remained watching me or had been allowed to return to the courtroom by the jailers. I couldn't tell, and for that moment was not interested, since it was his words which put thoughts about Ellen from my mind.

'We need to talk,' he called across the courtroom.

When I arrived at the dock, Santos glanced quickly at the jailers and, taking his lead from the thinner of the two, the huge jailer turned his back on us in a clumsy attempt to give us some privacy. Santos was beginning to exert his control on these men too.

'You didn't ask DI Ross how that cassette tape came to be on the yacht,' Santos said to me.

'You got my brother to keep Telfer under surveillance.'

'He was rather good at it. Policing skills must run in the family.'

'One day soon, whatever the final verdict, this case is going to be over. Then you're going to get out of our lives.'

Santos smiled. 'Of course I will.' He paused, and added, 'But I will miss you three.'

'Three?'

'You, Francis, and young Ruth.'

'Leave her out of it.'

'Do you still think I'm guilty?'

'Not of murdering Telfer. But you're guilty of something, maybe not even a crime. I don't think you've had an innocent day in your life.'

'Spoken like a man who's had so many,' Santos said. He licked his thin lips before going on, 'I'm sorry we cannot be on better terms. I had hoped that after the case, should it turn out favourably, we could go out and celebrate.'

'Celebrate?'

'I don't know, I thought perhaps we could hire a yacht.'

'You don't care about anything, do you?'

'I tried to help Anna Beth Archer and she is dead. I cared about my family and now they are dead.'

'How did they die?'

'When a man is shorn of his family, nothing else matters. It's like I'm wandering alone on this alien planet inhabited by creatures with families and friends. And . . . I hate them. I never used to set much store in hate.' He ran his delicate hand past his black eyebrows, and through the shock of white hair that fell about his head. 'Your family is safe from me, David,' he said, turning to the jailers. 'I'm ready to return to my suite.' As they took hold of him he whispered to me, 'I'm teaching them about the joys of winter jasmine.'

Sebastian Santos was taken into the ancient cells below the courtroom. The jailers appeared to me now less like his captors and more like private guards.

* * *

Frankie and Train sat in the advocates' room hunched over the laptop screen, while Ruth paced behind them, lost in thoughts of her own.

'How much more evidence is there against Santos?' Frankie asked.

'They'll try to get the Sorensen tape in now,' I replied.

'And that will confirm the confession?'

'I'm going to object to it first.'

'Jesus Christ, will you stop playing the toughest boy in the playground. You've proved yourself, haven't you?' he said. 'Why do you want someone like Santos released on to the streets?'

'Because I think that's the best way to protect you.'

'What if I was to tell you that you're wrong?' he said.

'Like you know the difference between right and wrong.'

Train thumped his fist down hard on the low table. 'Hey, hey, hey! Now I've been ruining my eyes on this two bit play station and there seems to be no one the slightest bit interested in what I'm doing.' He got up and lifted the laptop to his chest, saying, 'I know, I'm going to throw this damn machine out of the window, go home and buy some goat curry. You have business to sort that don't concern Night Train Nelson.'

'It always concerns you,' I told him.

'Of course it does,' Frankie said.

'Please, Troy,' Ruth said, taking him by the elbow and guiding him back down into his seat.

He sat there sullenly for a few seconds, then said, 'Right, now have I got your attention?' We confirmed that he had and he showed us the screen. 'There's only two more hits to check out. I clicked on them quickly, but neither makes much sense. First is Casas del Morte. The houses of death. Some refrigeration units outside Madrid where this sicko serial killer had body parts in cold storage.'

'Could be promising,' I said.

'If I may be permitted to continue?' Train said in a mock English accent. 'Second one don't make much sense either. Not

to me, anyhow. Casas, Las. Author of some old library book that's on-line. Sixteenth-century and—'

He was interrupted by a knocking at the door. Behind us the usher poked her head around the frame. 'Stipe's coming back in, Mr Kilkenny,' she said.

I thanked her, and said to Train, 'Check them both out.'

'Even the old book?'

Stanfield and I stood along advocates' row. I was fighting my corner alone now, Frankie having stayed out with Train and Ruth. The heat of the fray had destroyed the usual decorum, so instead of making our arguments one after another, we were firing our submissions towards the Bench at the same time, overlapping, cutting each other off, anticipating the next argument.

We agreed a schedule of 'Section 9' admissions, cold facts neither side disputed such as times, dates, the hiring of the boat by the bank – I kept Frankie's name out of the court record. Finally, we were left with the admissibility of the Sorensen tape.

Sorensen had not turned up. Usually if a witness is absent, his evidence in the form of statement, affidavit or tape cannot be adduced, since it is hearsay. But there is one significant exception. One hope to which Stanfield clung. A statute from 1988, which in exceptional circumstances allowed in the recorded hearsay evidence of an absent witness.

'The situation in law is crystal clear,' I contended with confidence, even though this was not something I felt.

'It's far from clear,' Stanfield countered. 'Mr Kilkenny has opened the door to the tape's admission by his detailed cross-examination of DI Ross about her statement in comparison with the tape. He even said he would put the tape in himself.'

'I said I might put it in. Which means I might not. I am not seeking to.'

'He is trying to have his evidential cake and eat it.'

'I am trying to ensure that the court applies the law of the land. You cannot allow in first-hand statutory hearsay in committal proceedings. It doesn't apply to the magistrates' court.'

'It does. For example, if you were trying a lesser offence, say. So it *can* apply sometimes to a magistrates' court.'

'But only for trials of driving offences, petty offences, not a murder committal,' I said.

Jarrow held up his hand. 'I think Mr Kilkenny is right,' he said. But just as relief rushed through me, he added, 'And I think Mr Stanfield is also right in a way. The law appears to prevent the prosecution using a tape like this in a committal, but Mr Kilkenny, in his attack on DI Ross, did effectively put the contents of the tape in issue.'

I had had to gamble by using the tape in my attack on Ellen. Without the references to the tape, her fabrication of Santos's confession didn't make sense. But here was the downside – I might just have let in damaging evidence which was otherwise inadmissible. What alternative did I realistically have? If Ellen's evidence stood undamaged, the committal was over and I had lost anyway. My mind trawled rapidly through new possibilities. I had to guess where Jarrow had got to in his assessment of the case. He was clearly unhappy with Ellen's testimony. If he wasn't, then it wouldn't matter about Sorensen's tape. The committal was over anyway and Santos would be sent to the Bailey for trial. So I had achieved something.

I remembered a principle from the law on identification. It might just work.

'Take into account something else,' I told Jarrow. 'I'm going to assume you are not satisfied with the confession evidence or you would not wish to hear further argument on this.' I held my breath – if I was wrong, it would all come crashing down around me now. Jarrow said nothing. 'If the confession evidence is damaged, and the Sorensen evidence is also questionable, then aren't you in the same position as a judge in an identification case

having to decide whether two flawed identifications can be enough?'

I grabbed my heavy copy of Archbold, found the chapter on identification. My fingers struggled with the wafer-like pages, the new, virtually transparent Bible paper the publishers used to keep three thousand pages of criminal law in one volume.

I found it. 'The case of Tyler and Others,' I said. 'Inherently poor evidence is not improved by mere repetition.'

'But why is the Sorensen evidence poor?' Stanfield protested.

It was exactly what I wanted to hear. I could launch my tirade, knowing that my opponent had asked for it.

'Because it's the evidence of a man who has disappeared. A man under the cloud of perjury and perverting the course of justice. A man with a very real motive for committing the murder himself. And even if you look at the provisions of the CJA 1988, which the prosecution must rely upon, how can you be satisfied that under 2(c) "all reasonable steps have been taken" to find him? How do you know he is really absent "through fear" of my client? Is it fair that I have no chance to "controvert" his statement in his absence? It's for these very reasons that such evidence is not allowed in committal hearings. These two pieces of evidence are like two drunken men leaning against each other. They might appear stable for a moment, but are likely to collapse at any minute.'

I realised that our legal cut and thrust had changed from an argument about the admissibility of Sorensen's tape into final submissions about the entire case, about whether Jarrow should throw out the murder charge or not.

Stanfield had also grasped this fact. 'Sir, you cannot so easily dismiss the evidence of DI Ross, a senior police officer. She has given evidence of Santos's confession. Now a jury might believe it. It might not. But the only issue for you at this stage is whether her testimony is *some* evidence of Santos's guilt. You should not assess her credibility at this stage save in exceptional circumstances.'

I was weak here. Normally a confession is the end of the matter, the case will be sent to the crown court for trial, but my all-out assault on Ellen had created serious doubts about the authenticity of her evidence in Jarrow's mind. I still had a slim chance.

'My opponent is wrong,' I said. 'According to the case of Brooks v. DPP, you can assess the credibility of a witness at a committal in the "clearest of cases". This court should ask itself whether it has ever heard a more unsatisfactory account of a confession given by a senior police officer.'

I hated saying it, seeing Ellen sitting there, pained and deathly pale. This was down to me.

'What do you say to that, Mr Stanfield?' Jarrow asked.

'We say that we as the prosecution represent the Crown, the people of this city, but we also represent Jack Telfer, and his right to have the man who murdered him brought to justice. Mr Kilkenny made great play of a slip that DI Ross made in her evidence, when she said that she wanted to avenge her former colleague. It might sound unfashionable put so bluntly. But the DI said this honestly. And this court should never forget that one of the four principles which the criminal justice system is here to serve *is* public vengeance for the crime. Punishment, deterrence, rehabilitation and vengeance. Vengeance is one form of justice.'

I cut in, 'One form. The lowest form of justice. The most dangerous form of justice. I accept that this is just one case in the vast calendar of criminal cases that makes up the criminal justice system. But it is a big test of that system. It is a test of whether we are truly presumed innocent under the law. No matter how unworthy the defendant may seem, no matter how little deserving of justice he might appear. And most importantly, no matter how terrible the crime he is charged with. I cannot think of a more hideous murder ever before these courts. And I cannot think of *any* other occasion where it has been more important to remember that the cornerstone of freedom under the law comes from our right to be presumed innocent.'

I sat down to silence around the courtroom.

Perhaps like me those gathered citizens were secretly fearful that on some dimly foreseen date it might be not Santos but one of them, their family or their friends in that dock, accused by the state of an appalling crime because they happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. But had I convinced Jarrow that every time we turned a blind eye to railroading a defendant, we put another dent in the shield that had protected us since Magna Carta?

I waited for another round of submissions, but knew there was little more I could say. Jarrow would decide the case on what he had already heard. It was, as Frankie would have said, already a done deal.

I waited in the advocates' room, the echoes of the arguments for and against Santos still spinning in my mind. Train spoke to me, pointing out some text on the laptop screen which now shone more brightly in that small room; the skies above the city darkened. I thought of Jarrow, alone in another room in the same building, and how he had to grapple with the issues raised by Telfer's death and his responsibilities under the law.

Train's eyes danced with excitement.

Something about the title of the Las Casas book.

I barely heard him; he repeated that it was entitled *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. It seemed unimportant to me. Frankie was hunched over the screen, highlighting a paragraph of the on-line text with a click of the mouse, but the letters on the page appeared to me as unintelligible as hieroglyphics.

The next page they downloaded from the World Wide Web was a map of the Americas from the early sixteenth century. Here was the world, not as we now know it to be, but as our forefathers charted it in the Age of Discovery. Europe was accurately mapped, but the other continents were misshapen.

Africa was squat, North America elongated, South America squashed, Australasia non-existent.

The centre of the world that the Spanish priest Las Casas had written about was South America.

A piece of the jigsaw snapped into place. South America, where Sebastian Santos, who called himself Casas, came from.

To one side of the landmass was the *Mare Pacificum.*

'The placid sea,' Frankie said. 'The Pacific Ocean.'

To the other side lay the *Atlanticus.*

Where I knew to be northern Brazil was the *Regio Canibali.*

'The Region of the Cannibals,' Frankie said. I saw tiny engravings of hideous monster-men.

*Die Nuw Welt,* the area was called.

'The New World in old German,' Frankie said.

Ruth read out a passage from the chapter on New Granada. 'These conquistadors were versed only in the science of tearing hapless victims limb from limb.'

An account of mass murder of the indigenous peoples by the Europeans. But the tales of slaughter meant nothing to me.

The usher called from the door behind us. 'Mr Kilkenny, the magistrate's reached his decision.'

I turned to leave.

'You'd better see something else,' Train said.

'I've got to be in court,' I told him.

'Davey, a minute.'

'No,' I told him.

I returned to Court Number One, passing the ranks of the public, who now appeared to me little more real than those long-dead magistrates whose dark portraits haunted the back corridors of the court building. I made another connection in my mind. When I had first met Santos, then masquerading under the name Casas, I had asked him where he came from.

He had said New Granada.

* * *

The faces on the public benches were frozen with anticipation, as if a huge canvas by Goya had been draped around the courtroom. All sorts of faces, beautiful and ugly, merging into one terrible vision of judgment.

'I've reached a decision,' Jarrow said.

I glimpsed Frankie rush through the courtroom doors, my laptop in his hand.

'I have very carefully considered the arguments on both sides in this case,' Jarrow went on.

Frankie arrived breathlessly at my row, and I saw Jarrow hesitate as my brother joined me. Then he continued reading his prepared script.

'I remind myself that as an examining magistrate I have a high duty to ensure that only those cases go forward that are properly founded in law and evidence.'

Frankie sat right next to me, his arm pressed against mine. 'Davey, you've got to see this,' he breathed, his eyes wild – but with what I couldn't tell.

'Stand up, Sebastian Santos,' Jarrow said.

Santos stood behind me.

Frankie opened up the laptop as if unfolding the leaves of a large book.

Jarrow said, 'On the charge of murder brought against you, I find – on the evidence before me – there is no case to answer.'

An eruption of noise in the courtroom.

Deep within me, too, shouting and screaming at what I had done, at what I had been used to do.

A picture on the PC screen, terrifying yet utterly familiar. A victim from the Golden Age of Discovery. Stretched, burned, tortured.

'I discharge you from this court,' Jarrow said to Santos.

Again I fixed upon the image from the Las Casas book. An agonised face – just like Jack Telfer's.

'You are free to go,' Jarrow continued.

I grabbed the post-mortem photographs of Telfer's tortured

body, the burned flesh of the feet, the incinerated ring of tissue around the neck, his arms distended on both sides of his head, the mask of pain that was his face.

All identical to the Casas book.

I heard the door to the dock click open, and Sebastian Santos walked from Court Number One discharged by the due process of the law from the murder of Jack Telfer.

I heard Santos say to the jailer, 'Are they ready?' and the jailer nodded.

I had freed my guilty client, and had ensnared myself.

Then I was rushing to the front steps of the court, where I grabbed Santos's arm.

'*Las* Casas,' I shouted at him.

My mind was filled with the horror of what I had done, fists tightened ready to fly. I wasn't going to let him walk free. I wanted to hurt him. I wanted to stop the pain growing ever stronger inside me. Frankie tried to hold me back. I pushed him violently aside.

'*Las* Casas,' I cried.

Suddenly I felt dizzy, the vertigo of running to the edge of the cliff, forcing yourself to stare down the hundreds of feet to the surf below.

Santos and I were alone at the top of the grand stone steps that led up to the court building. Spread below us was the press of the nation. Dozens and dozens of story-hungry reporters.

TV cameras, photo flashbulbs, microphones.

Flashes exploded in my face. I was forced to close my eyes. Imprinted on the lids, as if illuminated by lightning strikes, were the images.

Telfer's tortured body – *flash* – the tortured victim in the Las Casas book – *flash* – Telfer's burned flesh – *flash* – *flash* – *flash*.

Now the questions arrowed towards us.

Mr Santos, are you going to sue?

Is this your greatest victory, Mr Kilkenny?

Did Sorensen really murder his colleague?

How will you get over the Boat of Horrors?

Do you have anything to say to your lawyer?

And Santos did. He had some words for his lawyer. He had these words for me. Words that would always remain carved in my mind. The words that once more turned the tide of my life.

He moved his mouth to my ear. He whispered. Four words. '*I killed him slowly.*'

Santos held each arm out horizontally, shut his eyes, and his features filled with sorrow, as if it were he who had suffered torture, he the one who had been crucified.

With this extraordinary spectacle, with the most notorious free man in the capital standing there as if nailed to an invisible cross, the clamorous press fell silent. But this could not last. It did not. Since from all directions other men and women began to arrive.

Some on foot. Others in vans.

And they all brought the same gifts to Santos's circus: white winter jasmine.

Santos nodded, and these sellers from the nearby flower stalls distributed the incense-laden white blooms to the astonished press corps.

'My small peace offering,' Santos called out, his face mysterious, 'to a city that both accused and acquitted me. White are the flowers of mourning, because although today I am overjoyed, I would ask everyone to remember and mourn that dedicated officer Jack Telfer.'

He turned to me, whispering now even more softly, the faintest breaths of speech, rounded with his charming little smile. 'There are more killings to come. You haven't even *begun* to find the bodies.'

I felt like retching as the fragrance I loved most in the world now travelled down inside me and made me feel sick to my very soul.

'I'm taking you down, Santos,' I told him.

'You'll destroy yourself.'

'I'll see you in hell.'

'Look around,' he whispered. 'Where do you think we are? This is David Kilkenny's small corner of hell – where the power of the law bows.'

'What're you talking about?'

'Where the power of the law bows – to the power of the attorney.'

# Chapter Thirty-Six

Hell. Santos said we were in hell. Is hell for a lawyer the freeing of a murdering client?

The reporters' mouths opened and closed grotesquely, their questions distorted and delayed, a tape recording that had been slowed down, in bass tones, frightening.

Is this your greatest victory, Mr Kilkenny?

My most terrible defeat, deepened by the fact that I could say nothing about it. My knowledge of Santos's guilt was trapped inside my head, a secret part of me, a force of life that I had helped to create, that I had nurtured and prepared for. I had been midwife to this ugly birth.

Yet even as I stood there, I was aware of a choice. I could have shouted out that I knew my client was guilty. I would ruin my career – and achieve what? My credibility would be shredded; I would be considered crazy, disloyal, unprofessional, dangerous.

My gut told me this was not the way. If I wanted to get Santos, as every part of me demanded, I would have to find another way. Another time, a more private form of justice.

I became aware of Frankie behind me. I turned to him, and felt ashamed. He had wanted me to lose the case. All he had wanted was for a man guilty of murder to pay for it. Elder brother right, younger brother wrong.

'How do you feel about the people who put you in the dock?' someone asked Santos.

His chin fell slightly, he cocked his head to one side, and ran his fingers through his trauma bleached white hair, as if disappointed by what the world had done to him. He affected to trawl through his memory for the right words, even as I became convinced that he had anticipated and prepared for this moment from the time he was arrested. 'As a wise man once said, we must forgive wrongs darker than death or night. This is what it is to be good and beautiful and free.'

I saw reporters scribbling down his words. The tapes in hand-held recorders turned, cameras rolled.

'Who said that?' someone called.

'Your poet Shelley. Though I paraphrase a little,' Santos said, now an English teacher standing in front of an adoring class.

'The sonofabitch,' I said to Frankie.

'What can we do?'

'Fight back.'

Santos turned, pointed at me and shouted to the reporters, 'I would not be free now if it wasn't for my lawyer. David Kilkenny. Kilkenny. K-I-L—'

I didn't stay to hear him humiliate me further. I took Frankie back into the court lobby. Leybourne flew at us from the courtroom doors. He held his wire glasses in his hands, as if in the depths of his rage they would not stay on his face.

'You'll fucking pay,' he promised.

Was this meant for me or Frankie – or both of us?

'Leave us alone,' Frankie told him.

'You know I can't,' Leybourne said, before he pushed deliberately past us on his way to Santos and the press.

I saw Ellen. Alone, by the back wall.

I rushed towards her, my heart filled with remorse and loathing for what I had done to her. She cowered, as if I were about to strike her.

'Elles, I'm so sorry,' I said.

She looked at me with fear still in her eyes.

'I don't know what to say.' I told her. 'You were right. He's guilty.'

Her eyes looked down so that I saw the raw eyelids clearly. When she looked up, there were red rims around her corneas. She had been crying.

'Forgive me,' I said.

She nodded. Then said, 'I lied.'

'What?'

'There wasn't enough evidence. We needed more evidence.'

'You invented the confession?'

'That's what you proved in court, wasn't it?'

'Why are you telling me now?'

'I'm sick of all the lying,' she said.

'But he is guilty.'

'Then how did that drug get into his bloodstream? Tell me that, Dave. You really crucified us with that.'

'He probably took a small amount. Then he could say: Look, I've been drugged too.'

'We both know the score, don't we? Both doing our jobs, Dave. You just did yours better.'

'Ellen, listen to what I'm saying. He is guilty.'

'Of course he's guilty.' She began to head towards the restricted area, then turned and whispered to me. 'Don't do anything stupid, Dave. Not now.'

I said, 'I can't let this go.'

The other three went to my office to drop off the brief and law books, while I kept on going down Cable Street, towards the river where Santos had tortured Jack Telfer to death, to my father's bar.

The iced air froze my face as darkness dropped over the city, and countless points of light appeared from the south. Condensation dripped in long streaks down the windows of the bar;

the wide-screen television glowed cobalt blue in the dimly lit room, and I could hear the regulars talking at a hundred miles an hour. No one noticed my entrance since all eyes were fixed upon the wall mounted TV screen. In the heart of our family bar were the pictures of Santos standing on the steps of the court building. The perspective seemed strange to me – I had experienced the same scene only minutes before but looking the other way.

'There's young David,' Jimmy Corrigan shouted to my father, winking with his lazy eye.

'The boy's done it now, Conor,' Mick Weir called out, producing a gale of laughter at my father's expense.

In the crush around the screen, I could barely see Dad, just the back of his head. I moved closer and saw more and more of his features – his cheeks flushed, his mouth tightly pursed. He was in pain and I knew it.

'Dad,' I called out.

All eyes turned upon me in a flash, and as soon as the barflies realised that I was among them, the jokes and jibes stopped. I went through them, went right up to the screen, saw myself now captured on camera in the shadows behind Santos, and pulled the plug at the back of the television. The room darkened, people began to protest.

'The bar's closed,' I said.

My words provoked a flood of appeals directed at Dad, but he echoed what I had said.

I went to the front door, opened it and stood in the sharp draught that blew in off the river. People gathered their things, gulped down what remained of their drinks, and trudged out in bad spirits, grumbling and scowling at me. When the last of them had left, I turned the sign over to Closed. 'Dad, I need your help,' I said.

He put down the half-dozen pint glasses he had expertly gathered into his arms. 'Dad, did you hear what I said?'

He didn't look at me as he spoke. 'You don't need my help,' he replied.

'Dad—'

'You've never needed my help.'

'Dad, he's guilty.'

'And that only bothers you now?'

'No, he told me he was guilty.'

His face became more ashen, his eyes sadder; his lips had a bluish tinge. He put down the glasses and massaged his left upper arm with his hand.

'He told me after he was released,' I said.

'And you used your wiles and your ways in court to get him released.'

'I'm not proud of what I did.'

'You won, didn't you? That's what you always want to do, son, isn't it? Win?'

'I want your advice.'

At these words, he blinked. He opened his mouth slowly, as if stretching the jaw muscles rather than yawning, and concern grew inside me.

'What do you want, son? That I say it's all right? That I forgive you? Go to Jack Telfer's grave, if they've even allowed the poor man to be buried yet, and ask him.'

He began to pick up the glasses again and I grabbed his hand. The pint glass nearest the edge of the table was jarred; it toppled and seemed to fall in slow motion towards the floor, startling me as it finally shattered violently in the still bar.

'I warned you not to do this case. Didn't I?'

'I'm accepting that.'

'*Now* you are.' His words came thick and fast, and he winced as he produced them, as if they had been welling inside him for weeks or months, even longer, and they were unstoppable. 'But you always think you know best. Even when people come to you with advice, you have to know best. You have to defy everyone. You have to do exactly what everyone tells you not to do. You're so big on having to make your own decisions. But when will you finally learn that you always – always – decide wrong?

Honest to God, David, you always decide to do the wrong bloody thing.'

'Like you did,' I shouted back.

'Like I did what?'

'Decided to do the wrong bloody thing.'

'When?'

'When you decided to keep us, Dad. When you refused to have us fostered.'

His face filled with pain, and if it is possible for a father to hate his son, my father hated me at that moment. He held his left arm against his tightening chest. His breath was short, strained, painful. 'Yes, I made a mistake. Look at the two of you. One consorting with murdering criminals, the other getting them off.'

'We are what you made us,' I retaliated, hating myself as I said it, forcing myself to believe what I did not believe.

'If your . . . your mother—'

'I never knew her. I killed her. You always believed I killed her. You never forgave me.'

'If . . . she could see—'

His eyes suddenly creased tight and his body crumpled, his head falling towards his chest as if someone had landed a huge haymaker in his gut. His teeth snapped so tightly that I thought they would break on each other. His face was concrete. He fell, clutching his chest, emitting inhuman noises through his clenched teeth. I dropped to his side, tried to get to his heart, but his right arm was held so rigidly across his body that I would have had to have damaged it to get it out of the way.

'Dad,' I cried. 'Dad, speak to me.'

Hissing came from his mouth. He was still breathing, he was still alive. He needed more help than I could give. He lay lost in a seizure, and I had caused it.

I ran to the phone behind the bar, dialled 999, called for an ambulance. I raced back to my father, was finally able to ease his arm away, began massaging his chest. I took off the jacket I had worn in court, made a pillow of it, placed it under his head. His

eyes stared up at me, frightened and trapped, unable to communicate, imprisoned in a body that was failing. He was horribly aware of his plight.

'Hang on, Dad, hang on,' I urged him.

He didn't acknowledge me.

The other three joined me in the waiting area of A&E, and for what seemed like hours we sat in virtual silence. There was nothing we could do. Dad had suffered a heart attack, the extent of which they had either not determined or refused to tell us.

But my guilt would not let me be silent indefinitely. 'Frankie—'

He took me by the shoulders and, seeing that I was on the edge of tears, held me tightly. 'We don't mean to hurt each other,' he said. 'You, Dad, me. None of us do.'

More time passed. Train decided to get some food and Frankie said he wanted to join him. Ruth and I were left alone.

We were now in a small room off the main waiting area. It had housed a refreshment kiosk that was now boarded up following the establishment of a chain of hospital mini-marts. Someone awaiting news of a loved one had whiled away the time by beginning to eat and then abandoning a fried chicken takeaway. Someone else had been chewing gum, for there were a dozen little balls of shining foil on the floor, and a sugary scent in the air.

I pulled my chair up to Ruth's, but she would not look at me, fixing her eyes on the floor.

'He's a fighter,' I said.

She nodded.

'Ruth,' I continued, 'I can't believe what I said to him. It's the worst thing I've ever done. He's right, I always get it wrong. It's me – I'm the one who causes the grief in the family. I'm the—'

'Shut up,' she cried, suddenly looking up at me. Her cheeks dripped tears.

'What's happening to Dad, it's my fault,' I said.

'You're making it worse.'

'What?'

'No, not now,' she said.

'What are you talking about?'

'Please. Not now.'

I knelt before her, put my hands on her thighs as she sat in front of me. She reached out, her hair loose around her shoulders, and touched my face gently.

'I'm so sorry. I don't know how to make all this right,' I told her.

'It's such a mess,' she replied.

'What won't you tell me?'

'I can't say now.'

'Do you think anything could be worse than what's happening to Dad?'

'No, that's not what I mean. I just have no right to make things worse for you now.'

'Is it to do with Dad? If it is, then why can't I know now?'

'It kind of is. But—'

'Is it to do with me?'

'I'm not going to play Twenty Questions. Please.'

'Ruth, do you think I'm playing?'

'No. Of course you're not.'

'I want to know. I'm going to go absolutely crazy now if you won't tell me. I swear to God, Ruth. I'll—'

'OK, David, OK,' she said.

We were momentarily silent. A trolley rattled along outside in the corridor.

'So?' I asked.

'It's to do with your brother.'

'Tell me.'

She closed her eyes slowly, and did so.

Everything changed.

'Your brother proposed to me,' she said.

My very first reaction, my hope against hope, was not to believe it. It had to be some kind of sick joke of Frankie's. But how could he have persuaded Ruth to play along? I considered the timing, the place, her tears. I knew it wasn't a joke. And this was confirmed to me when she said, 'Do you know why he proposed?'

I felt my head shaking. Then a desperate hope filled my spinning mind. 'You haven't accepted?'

'I haven't answered.' She took my hand and, feeling the warmth of her small fingers against my skin, seeing before me everything I was losing, my rage overwhelmed me.

'Do you love him?' I asked.

'In the way I love you? Never.'

'Does he love you?'

'Not like that.'

'Why did he propose? How can you even be considering it if you don't love him?'

'Oh, David. Think about it.' She looked away from me. 'I'm pregnant.'

Time fractured. A series of soundbites worked through my mind. Our exchanges over the previous weeks, her words to me; I couldn't hear what I had said to her. And now I was silent. Her face was pained, her eyes sad; I didn't doubt what she had told me.

'When did it happen?'

'When he came out of hospital in New York. We got drunk.' She shook her head. 'What were we thinking? I came off the pill after he left London. The chemicals are meant to clog up your system for a bit. Jesus, girlfriends of mine – you remember Liz Harrison – she's been trying to conceive for eighteen months. We thought: just once.'

'You said it was over between you.'

'It was – is. He doesn't want me to keep it. If I do, he's made the offer. His old-fashioned sense of chivalry. It's not anything else.'

'And where do I fit in?'

'Where you've always fitted in. Do you know how close to the edge he is? He's cracking, David. Your brother is barely in one piece and it scares me. Don't jeopardise your relationship with him over this.'

'No, you've done that for me. Are you keeping it?'

'It is not an "it". It is a child growing inside me, David, and I can't give it up.'

I turned away from her.

'Please look at me,' she said. 'I did want to tell you sooner. Please give me another chance. You go to court and plead for understanding and forgiveness for killers and rapists and drug dealers and you can't even look at me now.'

'Are you going to accept his proposal?'

'Not if you want me.'

I couldn't see a way out. She was having my brother's child. She would give birth to my brother's child. Even if she did not marry him, there could be no hope for me. How could I possibly be with the mother of Frankie's child?

I heard footsteps outside. Ruth and I glanced at each other, fearful of what would happen next.

'I'm going to tell him about us.'

'No,' she said.

I heard my brother's voice. He came around the corner, smiling, talking quietly to Train.

He held a Styrofoam cup of coffee out to me. 'Davey, I got you a—'

He took in my face. My silence. Our stillness in the waiting room. My eyes followed his towards Ruth's. She shook her head and bit her lip.

'Davey,' he began. 'Ruth's told you our news?'

'I love her,' I said. 'I'm in love with her.'

'What?'

'She has been seeing someone while you've been away. It's me. We haven't done anything yet.'

He shook his head, grief all over his face; perhaps like me he

realised the damage to our relationship all this must necessarily cause.

'Frankie, I want you to know the truth.'

'Truth? I was always the one sailing close to the wind. You were Mr Moral. And you know what? You're as big a fraud as me.'

I flung out my left fist, dashing the cup of scalding coffee from his hand. It flew into the corridor, spewing burning liquid everywhere.

They wouldn't let me see my father. In my overheated state, they couldn't let me near a heart patient. So I suddenly found myself out in the chilled night air, lost in my own city, at war with my family. I didn't know where to go or what to do. I was assured there would be no definite news about my father for several hours.

No lights were on in my office. In the darkness, I lashed out and kicked the heavy punch-bag in the back room until my arms burned and my stomach muscles ripped. My anger intoxicated me; it filled my brain, careered through my blood, filled me completely until unleashing my rage into a boxing bag was not enough. I staggered into the front office. I hauled up a chair and threw it. I pulled down shelves. I ripped Ruth's jasmine plants from their pots and flung them against the walls. Soil showered on to carpets, over briefs. I fell into my desk, felt my knee impacting against its sharp corner. I cried out.

The only glimmer in the room came from the computer screen. An icon flashed slowly, insistently.

It was the e-mail icon.

It said, 'You have one new message.'

In the gloom the words flashed like a cheap neon sign above a strip bar. I felt like ripping the VDU off the desktop and hurling it out of the window into the street below. Maybe things would have turned out differently if I had.

The IP number, the identification code for the sender, was 'unavailable'. It had been bounced off 'safe' sites. The sender would be untraceable to anyone else.

But I knew who it was from.

I couldn't believe anyone else would have taken such care to disguise their address. I couldn't believe anyone else would have such a need to do so.

There were just two words from Sebastian Santos.

His message read, '*The yacht.*'

# Chapter Thirty-Seven

From the quayside, the yacht appeared little more than a silhouette. It was crowned by a shower of lights that were actually half a mile away, on the other side of the river. Around me, the condominium developments fronting the marina spilled their brightness both into the brackish water immediately below and upward, creating strange haloes in the sky above their ziggurat construction.

I waited for five minutes, my confusion mounting. I had seen no one on the yacht, whereas the last time I was on board there had been a uniformed guard. But why was no one present now? Police tape remained around the walkarounds of the craft, but there was no sign of life on any deck. No light. The generator was not working. Nothing.

I held my watch face up towards the lights above and saw that it was 2.40 a.m. I guessed that the police had either called off the watch on the yacht since the case was over, or that whichever PC had been designated to keep guard had taken a 'bunk'. I remembered how lazy officers had boltholes on their beat, places where they could take a time out while on patrol. A minor form of corruption. And if an officer had been detailed to the yacht he must have figured that the press had had their fill. Go and get a coffee from an all-night caff, find somewhere to snooze.

Or maybe the PC was inside asleep.

I waited another five minutes, until the tops of my ears were frozen and I began to lose feeling in my toes. I persuaded myself of something else. Santos wouldn't throw down a challenge just so that I could see a PC sleeping on duty. He had something more in store for me.

I passed smaller boats tied with ropes to the quayside, none of them in the class of the vessel Santos had used for his murder. The quay platform itself, a horizontal trestle of blocks of wood with long struts running in parallel underneath, seemed to sway below me. I knew it was just the disorientating effect of the rise and fall of the water on either side of it. The small cross-blocks did not form a complete surface, since a small gap of no more than an inch was deliberately left between adjacent pieces of wood to allow for drainage after high tide. Our river was one of the most tidal, most temperamental, to course through a major city.

I heard the gushing of the water under the platform. I looked down and saw blackness beneath my feet. I drew nearer and my perspective on the boat changed. The South Bank lights dropped out of my view like falling stars, while others rose behind. Farther I went, a man walking a gangplank built on to the very rim of the city, as before me the river spread left and right, east and west, in all its immensity.

It seemed quietly alive, like the basking sharks Dad used to see when we were boys. The boat trembled on the water. I had to be careful to avoid a rope on the quay equidistant between the two tethers that held the *Corinth* in place. I stepped over it and was dwarfed by the size of the yacht. I knew why I was here.

I wanted to show Santos I was unafraid.

I moved as quietly as I could towards the lower rear deck, where it might be easier for me to board. I stopped, listened. Nothing.

Santos was a murderer. But that fact did not impress me. I had been face to face with more killers than Santos ever had. Serious criminals had provided me with my best cases, my

reputation and my most passionate performances in court. I knew that it was no difficult thing to kill a man. It took no superman to do it. Santos could have walked away after his release, he could have kept his mouth shut and enjoyed his triumph. But he twisted his knife into me in front of the nation's press.

I moved a few steps towards the front of the boat, crooked my neck so that I could peer into the side windows of the main salon, but the black reflective glass just mirrored my face dully. There was nothing for it except to go aboard. My eyes continued towards the sliding glass doors that constituted the back of the main cabin, and finally I realised what was wrong with this scene. One of the doors was ajar.

I looked around hastily for a weapon, any kind of weapon, but there was nothing in the immediate vicinity. I had taken a couple of steps back along the quay, almost tripping on the rope wrapped around the wooden planks beneath me, when I shamed myself into staying. What was Santos going to do? Kill me? He could do it any time he wished. He could hire someone to do it any place he wished. I was not going to hide. I was the easiest possible target for a hit. But my gut told me that Santos did not have something so crude in mind. That would be too easy. Too unsophisticated. It was not his style.

I glanced at the walkarounds that ran up the side of the boat. They were almost level with the top of the quay. I jumped; for a giddy second I was in the air between the quayside and the yacht, the black river below me. My arms reached out. My chest, abdomen, the front of my legs impacted against the smooth, cold side of the multimillion dollar yacht. My shoes, well worn, found it hard to grip. My left foot slipped, skidded off the edge; I clawed at the side windows; my eyes shot down to the impenetrable water beneath.

I was on board the Boat of Horrors.

I hung there for a moment, my fingernails scratching the side of the yacht, only with the sweating a vessel undergoes during the

temperature changes of the day and night. My toes clawed their way farther and farther forward inside my shoes, closer and closer to safety. I was secure for the moment, pressed flat against the flanks of the hundred-foot-plus creation of laminate, steel and wood. I edged my way to my left, towards the stern.

Previously, I had thought the boat seemed like a diving bird, but now it looked different. I imagined myself as hanging on to the flanks of a huge fish caught rising out of the water. Above me the comm tower jutted like a monstrous dorsal fin. I reached the point where the walkaround ended and the rear deck began.

I heard the screaming start.

And the smell. The smell of burning flesh. Sweet, sickly, turning my stomach. I blinked and shook my head. Fear reached up my throat and made me want to throw up, but I fought it back, scolding myself that it was my mind playing tricks, the imagination of an ex-cop revisiting the scene of a brutal murder. I saw the prosecution photos of Telfer's crisp skin, his forlorn eyes. I glanced around the side of the boat, through the cabin doors, and I could see him there. I saw my client too, the man I had released into the city I loved, standing over him, blowtorch aflame, fire spitting from it in a blue tongue.

The boat is *empty*, I told myself.

I blinked again and the horrid vision was gone. I saw the quiet, restful furnishings of the luxury superyacht. The inlaid woods, continuity of design, harmony. No one was there. Now I was sure. I dropped down on to the rear deck.

'Santos?' I whispered, my face in the gap between the doors.

No reply.

I felt the hull of the boat shudder as something, the wash of the tide perhaps, struck against it. I couldn't edge through the plate-glass doors as they were. I needed to widen the gap without leaving any obvious prints on the surface. Using my elbow, I inched the doors open.

Inside the cabin diffracted light from the marina spread weakly through the black one-way glass, throwing the furniture

into relief as lumps of shadow around me. There was the taped outline of where Jack Telfer's body had lain, a fluorescent stick-man on the floor.

Still no sign of life.

I moved forward, glanced quickly to my right as I remembered Sorensen's frantic words in his video affidavit. Santos had lunged at him from this spot, taking him out. Sorensen said he awoke in the cabin bedrooms below. I no longer believed my own propaganda from the courtroom, that it was Sorensen who had killed Telfer. I had played with the truth just as Santos had played with me.

I went down the stairs, my breathing quick, shallow. Shadows danced around me, changing their positions. I went into the depths of the boat, and believed that the vessel was alive with the ghost of a man whose face I had seen on a mortuary slab, the ghost of a tortured man who demanded vengeance.

I reached a landing.

To one side stairs went farther down into the engine room, where the diesels and catalytic converters lay. I felt the boat sway suddenly. Noise outside. Engine noise.

I saw a police launch heading right for me. I ducked below the porthole, then remembered that the glass was one-way. The wash from the launch knocked the yacht out of equilibrium, and I felt the slow dipping of the vessel as it returned to rest.

I was illegally in a cordoned-off crime scene.

There was a knocking from outside the hull of the vessel, as if the water anchor had not been properly fixed. The police launch came closer, the spotlights shining powerfully from it. I looked down at the engine room. I could try hiding in there, but if they came aboard they would find me eventually. I glanced back up the stairs, calculated that I'd have enough time to get on deck and off the craft before they arrived. Run down the quay, into the labyrinth of alleyways of the marina complex. I had a chance.

I ran as hard as I could up the stairs, not concerned about the

noise I made, taking two steps at a time, my knees flexing beyond ninety degrees, hauling myself up the banister rail. I crashed into a low padded chair in the main cabin, skidded, and could see out of the windows that my calculations had been wrong. The tinted glass of the yacht had distorted my perspective. The police launch was right upon me. Its spotlights flooded the cabin with yellow light as I dived flat on the floor, my face just inches from where Telfer had been tortured to death. My sweating cheek was right against the taped outline as the search beam passed over me.

The roar of the engine filled the cabin, and I could hear the electronic bleeps and clipped tones of radio communication. My eyes turned back to the rear cabin doors. They were open where I had entered. If the police saw that, they would definitely board the *Corinth*. But they maintained their position alongside. The recessed rear doors would be better seen from directly behind. It was a slim chance.

More radio traffic. Someone laughing.

'Out,' the radio operator called.

The engines surged. The wash lifted up the *Corinth* below me and I felt myself rising in relation to the city horizon beyond the doors. I held my breath. The engine's growling became fainter, and through the glass I saw the rear of the launch.

I climbed up to the top of the rear deck, stepped over the reams of police tape, balanced precariously as the boat continued to sway with the wash, then jumped. I hit the quay, tried to crouch, but was tripped by the rope tied around the surface of the platform. I quickly glanced down through the slats, a long, straight wooden ribcage, and saw that something was floating below the platform.

Something knocked gently against the side of the *Corinth*.

I followed the line of the rope as it disappeared into the water.

Someone had been tied beneath the quay.

Sebastian Santos had left me a gift.

I scrambled to the side, my body flat against the cold,

slippery wood, and, reaching out with my arms, hauled the rope hand over hand as my father had taught me.

I saw two feet tied together. A shape lashed to them with another rope. A weight to keep the body beneath the surface.

I kept pulling. I saw the back of a bald head and I felt sick, realising that it had probably been this skull that I had heard banging against the side of the boat.

I pulled harder and harder, though it was difficult to breathe with my diaphragm pinned to the quay. The body rolled over slowly like a huge fish. I saw a face. Or the remains of a face. But enough to recognise. Just. If the body had been in the water longer, the river crabs and predators that had chewed at the flesh would have made this face unrecognisable to human eyes. His features were misshapen, coming away, like a grotesque cubist painting.

I barely recognised Bill Sorensen.

With the weight tied to his feet, he was too heavy to pull out. But the slip knot had been inexpertly tied around his ankles, and even though my fingertips froze as I worked in the icy water, I was able to loosen the dead weight. The rope fluttered like a ribbon as it followed the weight to the bottom of the river.

Sorensen tied to the wharf. The Grace of the Thames.

I flexed my fingers to get some warm blood into the tips, then pulled Sorensen out of the water feet first. I tried to do it gently, smoothly, even though he was obviously beyond any feeling. His head bumped horribly against the side of the platform just before his body was fully clear of the water.

I stared down into the detective's face, shrivelled by his time in the river. Strings of flesh hung off his cheeks. His dead eyes were wide open and bleached.

*You haven't even begun to find the bodies.*

I sat on the dock, out of breath, exhausted with the effort, confused and overwhelmed, taunted by Santos's boasts, while the water drained from the dead detective down through the gaps of the platform and back into the river that had cradled him.

In my shocked state, I was only remotely aware of the noise of car engines. I got to my feet, saw uniformed officers, tipped off perhaps by the launch, running towards me. I glanced back at the yacht. There would be no hiding in the Boat of Horrors.

Uniforms were screaming out at me, '*Police.*' I stood trapped at the end of the quayside with a body at my feet.

Ten, twelve uniforms rushed at me. The water dripped from the detective. I held up my hands.

They hurtled along the deck, and I felt their arrival through the vibrations of the wood beneath me. I steeled myself as they reached me. I needed to. I was knocked to the ground, turned over. Someone stamped a boot on the back of my neck. My frozen hands were cuffed tightly behind me, the skin of my wrists chafing. Someone yanked the cuffs, and I felt like crying out, swallowed the pain.

A young PC threw up at the sight of the disfigured body next to me. Through the wooden platform, I could see his vomit hitting the river.

'What the fuck've you done, eh?' An unseen interrogator. Mid-twenties, I guessed, Northern accent.

Say nothing. Any truthful explanation now would create worse problems.

My eyes suddenly exploded with lights, my side burned. The kicking began.

'What the fuck've you done, eh?'

I couldn't keep silent. 'I didn't kill him,' I protested.

My hair was pulled. My head yanked up. I looked at the cop. Mid-twenties, but blond where I'd imagined dark hair.

'You're fucking going down for this,' he shouted at me.

'Listen,' I tried to tell him. 'I'm . . . I'm a . . . lawyer.'

Another kick. Harder, from the other side. Another cop joined in.

'Fucking scum. I know your fucking face.'

My head was smashed back down on the platform; the cartilage in my nose crunched, pain shot into my brain through my eyes.

Breathe.

I'd taken shots to the nose often enough in the ring. Hurt like hell. I knew this wasn't a breakage.

Yet another cop, again unseen to me, cried out, 'Christ, it's Bill Sorensen.'

'Who?' another asked.

'That undercover.'

A silence.

The beating would really start now. The boot ground into my neck again as I heard a call from farther down the quay.

'Get off him.' A woman's voice. '*Now.*'

Ellen.

I saw her with two more plainclothes detectives. NCS or CID, it was impossible to know. I didn't care.

Ellen passed the uniforms, flashed her warrant badge, and I watched as her feet grew bigger and bigger. She helped me up. I realised that there was salt in my mouth. My lip was bleeding.

'But, ma'am,' the Northern uniform tried to say.

'Shut the fuck up,' Ellen ordered him. 'All right?' she whispered to me.

I nodded.

'How long have you been here?' she asked me. 'The truth.'

'Twenty minutes,' I told her. My best estimate. Maybe it was thirty, maybe fifteen.

She looked down at the body. 'Been in the water at least four, six hours,' she lectured the uniforms, 'if any of you had bothered to check.'

The young lads looked down sheepishly.

She led me to the very end of the pier, still in handcuffs. She checked the cuffs, made them a ratchet notch looser.

'Thanks, Elles,' I said.

'Don't thank me yet,' she replied. 'Got to take you in, Killer.'

She firmly clasped the chain between the bracelets. 'Sorensen was terrified when I spoke to him before court.'

'Of what?'

'Said Santos knew where to find him. Seems he was right,' she said, leading me in.

# Chapter Thirty-Eight

I was taken in Ellen's car to the NCS building, which I would enter as a suspect and not as an advocate. A young uniformed woman PC drove, allowing Ellen to turn around and address me.

'You're quiet, Killer,' she said.

'Nothing to say.'

'I think you've got a lot to say.'

'Not now.'

The end of the conversation in the car.

Once in the NCS building, my 'questioning' – it was not yet to be an official interview – did not commence until Leybourne arrived. I could hear Ellen and her supposedly ranking officer arguing outside the interview room. They'd taken my personal possessions as a matter of routine – wallet, keys. I didn't protest. Not yet.

Provisional ToD, Time of Death, had been established as before midnight by the forensic pathologist. They checked out my 'story', as they categorised any innocent explanation given by a suspect, with the hospital. My father had suffered a heart attack of uncertain severity. I had accompanied him in the ambulance. Junior detectives were even now checking the hospital CCTV to establish my entry and departure times.

'So why did you leave your critically ill father to go to the yacht?' Leybourne demanded.

I refused to tell him about Frankie and Ruth. I would have preferred to rot overnight in a cell than tell that cop at that moment about my family.

I did mention the e-mail.

'Not enough to prove it's Santos,' Ellen said.

'I want our techs to examine it,' Leybourne insisted.

'My PC contains legally privileged material.'

'We'll get a court order,' he promised. 'What were you doing with the body?'

'He was dragging it out of the river,' Ellen butted in, before I could respond.

'The "it" is Bill Sorensen,' Leybourne said. He leaned across the table to me. 'I don't like you. I don't trust you,' he said. 'You're going to be mine.'

'Think you have enough to charge me for Sorensen's murder?' I challenged him. 'Roll the dice, Leybourne. Get it wrong and I'll slap you with a writ for false imprisonment, assault and malicious prosecution. And I'll enjoy it.'

He stood over me, saying, 'You still don't know what's going on, do you?'

When he left, Ellen and I sat for a few seconds in silence. Then she removed her cellphone and pushed it across the table to me.

'Press Redial for the hospital,' she told me.

I spoke to a nurse in the intensive care unit; Dad was allowed no visitors until late morning. His condition was still serious, but stable. I slid the mobile back to Ellen.

'Well, another typical day in David World,' Ellen said, and I laughed.

She took my Section 9 statement about the discovery of Sorensen's body and we said little as she led me down and out of the NCS building. When I reached the steps by the river, she stood in front of me. Two cats were fighting in the distance. One of them screamed like a wailing baby. A car braked suddenly; traffic lights nearer to the main road changed to red.

I remembered my car, told her that it was still parked by the marina.

'Forget it. Come on,' she said.

'Where?'

She checked her watch. 'Hemingway's.'

The one place I could be certain of getting the drink I desperately needed at that early hour.

Ellen and I sat at a corner table well away from most of the newspaper hacks and night owls. Hemingway's had a low ceiling, having formerly been a coal cellar in the Victorian underground system. The room was a series of stone arches, which shook as all-night mail trains and service engines flew through the tunnel separated from us only by several layers of brick.

I watched the malt stir in my shot glass as the latest Tube rattled past. Ellen was a couple of drinks behind me. We drank whiskey. Irish whiskey.

'Well, well, well,' Ellen said. 'Just me and Friend of Flipper.'

'Shouldn't you be working on the Sorensen murder?' I asked.

'Been on duty thirty-six hours already,' she said. 'Girl's got to get some time to wash her hair, counsel.'

'Won't questions be asked?'

'Like I give a fuck.' She took a long sip, tossing back her bob of red hair. 'I can go AWOL for a bit. I'm due some time off. God, I haven't even been to the firing range for a month.'

'You're the last person who needs to work on your marksmanship.'

'Why don't you come down some time? Give me a chance to beat you at something again.'

Studying her face, I recognised traces of the fresh-faced girl who had been through basic with me, and as the alcohol soothed my nerves she became more and more attractive. On the table were Ellen's Camels. She held the open packet towards me.

'Go on, can't say it won't kill you. But it won't kill you quickly.'

I hadn't smoked for the best part of a decade, but I was tempted. Finally I gave in and she lit me up with her Laughing Policeman lighter, and laughed herself when I began coughing.

'See how good it is for you?' she said.

'Don't understand why you're helping me, Elles.'

She didn't reply at first, took up her glass and downed the rest of the whiskey while keeping her eyes fixed right on me. She wiped her wet lips with the back of her hand, then filled our glasses with the malt bottle that stood between us on the circular black table. She took another sip, removed her jacket, slung it across the back of her chair and undid a couple of the buttons on her pristine white shirt. She affected a deep bass voice.

'DI Ellen Ross didn't fail in her duty,' she said. 'The law failed in its promises.'

'Don't think I used those words.'

'Something like that.'

'I wasn't that eloquent.'

She moved the bottle to one side so that there was nothing between us on the table. 'You didn't see yourself, Dave,' she said. 'I don't know why you were so chivalrous to me. But I liked it.' She took another sip and looked at me seriously. 'It's a turn-on, isn't it?'

'What?'

'That stuff in court. You and me. Head to head. Everyone watching us. Us knowing we used to fuck.'

'Didn't think about it,' I mocked.

'Liar.' She held up her glass. 'A toast.'

'To what?'

'To . . . to justice being done.'

We clinked our glasses and drank. I added, 'And never getting bloody done if we've got anything to do with it.'

She laughed and choked a little on the whiskey. She coughed. 'Bastard.'

Our hands touched. 'So what now?' I asked.

'We retire to the rainforest and pick some fucking mangoes.'

'Actually, Elles, I hate mangoes.' Even as I said it, I drew some skewed pleasure from the fact that I believed it was a small betrayal of Ruth.

She picked up the bottle and looked at me with mischievous eyes. 'OK, what do you say, Killer? One more? For Auld Lang Syne?'

'Don't think I should have any more,' I replied.

'Yeah, like I'm talking about whiskey.'

Ellen's flat, drunkenly stripping off each other's clothes, sparring. Foreplay.

'I don't think we should be doing this,' I said.

'We definitely shouldn't.'

'We'll regret it in the morning.'

'It is the morning.'

'What would DCI Leybourne say?'

She burst out laughing, slumped back on to her bed and held her legs in the air for me to take off her boots. I hurriedly pulled at the heels until they were clear of her feet, at which point Ellen sprang up from the bed again, pressing her body tightly against mine. I looked down past her mouth, at her cleavage, while I reached around behind her, running my hands under her open shirt along the smoothness of her back, until I was surprised by the touch of metal in leather. The pouch for the cuffs she kept in the small of her back.

In a flash, Ellen had pulled them out, the metal of the bracelets glinting in the light from her bedside lamp. 'Be prepared.' She laughed.

She flung me on to the bed, following quickly. 'You are a very, very naughty lawyer.'

I undid the zip at the side of her trousers and felt the long, toned muscles of her legs. Annoyed, I tried to drive thoughts of

Ruth away. I wasn't doing this because of Ruth. Ellen and I kissed roughly, greedily. This wasn't to do with Ruth.

I couldn't kid myself.

The hint of daylight under the curtains woke me. I found myself naked, facing Ellen's back. She was curled up and my arm had gone to sleep under her body. There was a warm, musky smell in the air around us, and I tried to tell myself that I regretted nothing.

I lay for a while with my hands behind my head, staring up at the ceiling as the traces of light like pale paint spilled on to the carpet. My head throbbed from a whiskey hangover; images of the previous dreadful day flashed across my mind.

I thought Ellen was still asleep, but she spoke, without turning around to look at me.

'Know what that felt like?' she asked.

'What?'

'A rebound shag.' Now she did turn over, and with the shift in weight our bodies rolled towards each other in the centre of the mattress. 'Wasn't, was it, Dave?'

'Don't do this, Elles,' I replied.

' 'Course, could've been the "Get Your Own Back Bonk",' she said. 'I suppose it could be the "Farewell Fuck".' Then her face creased above the bridge of her nose as she thought. 'Didn't feel like a Farewell Fuck.'

'What does it feel like?' I asked.

'Like the last time we did it. When you told me you'd always love *her*. When you said you'd never get her out of your system so it was pointless us continuing. Hurt like a bastard, Dave.'

'Didn't want to keep lying to you.'

'You were thinking about Ruth last night, weren't you? Same old story, Killer.' With her eyes shut, she added, 'Still haven't said why you went to the yacht.'

'I told you, I got an e-mail from Santos.'

'So what? All it said was "The yacht". So fucking what? Unless.'

'What?'

'You knew something else.'

Her eyes bore into me and I didn't want to lie. She had got me out of a dangerous situation with Sorensen's body. She had watched my back. I wanted her to know.

'Tell me, Killer,' she whispered.

And I did. The Las Casas book, Santos's confession, his talk of other bodies. I told her everything except for Ruth's bombshell. When I finished my account she twisted her hips, flicked the duvet back. She took my hands firmly, painfully.

'Don't tell anyone,' she said.

'I've told Frankie.'

'No one in authority,' she said. 'You know what they'll do, Dave.'

I nodded. 'I could get any subpoena on me discharged, lawyer–client privilege.'

'Even after the case is over?'

'He was still my client. The Crown could reconsider and try to recharge.'

'What if you're wrong?'

'I don't think I am.'

'What *if*?' she said more desperately. 'Anyway, you go on the record against Santos, your rep as a defence brief is history. You know that.'

I remembered how hard it had been in the early days for me to earn the trust of my criminal clients. I levelled with those who hadn't heard about me before. I was an ex-cop, better tell you in case you have a problem with that. Better hear it from me than from someone else. At first, many went elsewhere. Result by small result, the word spread, slow-burning along the bush telegraph of the underworld through the boasts of acquitted criminal clients. I wondered why none of those guilty men had bothered me like Sebastian Santos.

Ellen watched as these thoughts danced inside me.

'Oh my God, you're going after him, aren't you?' she suddenly said, her eyes widening. 'That's why you went to the yacht.'

'I'm taking him down. No, I'm going to rip out his lying fucking tongue and throw it in the river.'

'Now you sound like Santos.'

'The sick fucker never swears.'

She smiled, wider than perhaps she wanted to. 'Let's do it. Let's get the bastard together.'

'This is between me and Santos.'

'Santos was my body, remember? He was my case. The fucking case has probably ruined my career.'

'So don't make it worse. I'm going to finish this. I've got to.'

'What about me? I owe it to Jack.'

'What do you owe him?'

'Everything,' she said.

'That's why the case was so personal?'

She nodded.

'Telfer was after you?' I realised that I had slept with a woman who had probably had sex with the victim from the Boat of Horrors. 'Did Jack get you?'

'Depends on your definition of get,' she said. 'How're you going after Santos?'

'Not in court. I told the truth to the corruption inquiry and look what happened.'

'Don't tell me you no longer believe in the system of justice, counsel?'

'Wrong question. Do I *want* to? Of course. But can I? On the evidence? The system hasn't allowed me that luxury.'

'Hey, philosophy and fucking,' she smiled. 'Like the old days, Killer.'

'Except we thought we could change things.'

'We've both grown out of that fairytale, haven't we?' She paused, then said, 'Ever think what might have been, Dave? You know, like that bloody river – if the tide had flowed the other way.'

'What do you mean? Us joining the police?'

'Not just that. Me joining the force, though. What a total fucking mistake – Look where it's landed me.'

'The NCS. You couldn't have done much better, Elles.'

'Or much worse. I know you hate talking about us, but I want you to know that if I could have had my time again, made the river flow backwards for a bit, I would never have let you go so easily. I would have fought to save us with everything I'd got. I'd have pulled every single dirty, low-down trick I knew.'

'That's always been your problem, Elles, when it comes down to it, you don't really know any. It's not you style.'

She shook her head. 'You'd better know something, then.'

'About what?'

'About Santos,' she said.

She pulled the duvet farther up, almost to her neck, and her eyes appeared frightened, darting suspiciously about the room. I knelt on the bed in front of her.

'Elles, come on.'

'We . . . they . . . oh, for fuck's sake, *we* buried the evidence.'

'What evidence?'

'We thought we had enough, then Sorensen went walkabout, and we thought Santos would never tell you about it because if he did, it just fixed him with a cast-iron motive.'

New connections, broken thoughts, additional scraps of information flew through my mind. 'Motive for killing Jack Telfer? That's where you were weak, on Santos's motive.'

'We had it all along – and *that's* why we were weak,' Ellen said. 'Jesus, I'm not supposed to say anything.'

'Elles, I don't care what you say, I'm going after Santos anyway.'

'Really?'

'You know me.'

'And you know that Santos was an informer. A supergrass.'

'I found out. He didn't tell me,' I said.

'Did he tell you about his family?'

'He told me they were dead.'

'But I'm going to guess he didn't tell you how they died,' she said. 'They were in witness protection.'

Now the links formed in my mind, like strings of DNA in a lab. 'Telfer used to work protection,' I said.

'And Sorensen. The family's identity was betrayed to the cartels, Dave. A wife and three children. There was an internal inquiry. It all began to point to Telfer and Sorensen as selling them out for big bucks. I challenged Jack about it.'

'Did he deny it?'

'He laughed.'

'Jesus.'

'The wife was delivered in the first bin-liner. She had been dismembered. What he didn't know, what she was no doubt excited and thrilled about and on the point of telling him, was that she was pregnant. Next came the children. One by one. The eldest son last.'

'Gabriel,' I said.

'He'd been pretty much left intact. I still keep imagining his thin naked body, bound and gagged. They slowly strangled him with chicken wire – not as slow a death as with piano wire, that they save for one of their own who's turned traitor. When I saw those pictures of him, I kept thinking of my Pete and how you can no longer see the scars on his body but every good thing in his life has been strangled out of him.'

She moved her head so that her face was covered by the duvet. I stroked her hair, which I knew was scant consolation. I imagined her younger brother shivering in a motorway lay-by after seven days and nights, still clutching the model aeroplane his captor had given him.

'Now you know why Santos killed Jack,' she said.

'It explains the false name. They would never have gone to the meet on the yacht knowing that the man whose family they had effectively murdered wanted to see them. OK, so Santos

didn't mention it in court because this was his motive. Why didn't the prosecution use it against him?'

'That was all the PII stuff. Imagine the stink. The NCS witness protection programme protects anyone except the witnesses? Do you know how many grasses would fly the nest if that came out? How many cases would fold? How many other sick, murderous bastards would be back on the streets? We told the stipe all this. He ruled that we didn't have to disclose it to you.'

'That's why Sorensen wouldn't come in? He knew witness protection was leaking like Chernobyl and Three Mile Island put together.'

'Bill Sorensen didn't know how far our investigations into the Santos family murders had gone. And Santos never would have told you about this background. Motive would have sunk him. He calculated you were good enough to get him off without going into all this.' She paused. 'He was right.'

The certainties of the case crumbled around me.

'Still want to go after him?' she asked.

'He's still used me. He's still a murderer – a torturer, who I've released into the city.'

'And what would you have done?' she asked. 'If Telfer and Sorensen had betrayed someone *you* loved to the cartels, to return to you in black plastic bin-liners? What would you have done, Dave, if they'd sold out Ruth?'

I returned home to change before heading to the hospital, but didn't have a chance to put my key in the door before Train opened it, in a rush and a bad mood.

'How's Dad?' I asked.

'A bit better. Going there now.'

I moved towards him but he raised his hand, his forehead creased. 'You know I'd do almost anything for you. Sometimes I don't know why. But, anyway, I ain't going to let you totally fuck your life.'

'I think that's pretty much done already.'

'Davey, look at me. Getting on for forty, busted knee, I sit around alone watching musicals and there's not one single woman on the face of the planet who loves me. I hate to break this to you, but I'm every bit as lovable as you. So my point is this. It's luck. That's all that divides us. And Ruth is a lifetime of luck all in one. Now she's upstairs and she's hurting too. So don't fuck it up. Or you'll have me to answer to, busted knee or not.'

'Yes, Train,' I said.

As I headed up to the flat, he said, 'Frankie told me to tell you something. He said not to worry. There's something he's got to do but when the time's right he'll let you know where and when to find him.'

'What do you mean?'

'He's gone.'

'Gone? Gone where?'

'To ground. Said he'll contact you when he's ready.'

'This is all Frankie b.s., Train.'

'Think it's the time for fucking around, Davey? He's serious. He's gone.'

I found Ruth standing in the kitchen, sipping a cup of coffee. She confirmed what Train had told me about Dad's progress. It also became clear that Frankie hadn't told her where he'd gone.

'He's as confused about where all this leaves us as we are,' she said. 'I was wrong not to tell you earlier about the pregnancy. Very wrong. But I hadn't made up my mind. If I wasn't going to keep it, then why should anyone else know? Your brother and I would keep going our separate ways and when the time was right – if you wanted me – we might have had a chance together. But now . . .'

'What are you saying?'

'That I can't imagine how you could ever forgive me.'

I shook my head. 'Ruth, I already have.'

She looked up at me, her eyes telling me that she could not comprehend this.

'The truth is,' I said, 'I can't see the point without you.'

She gasped – with relief, shock, I didn't know – then reached into her pocket and pulled out the golfer figurine.

'I was going to return this to you,' she said.

'No need. Perhaps one day – God knows when in the future – I might see you in that dress we talked about.' I said. 'For real.'

'What did you say?'

'You heard.'

Neither of us could say anything further before the ringing began downstairs. Someone had come to the office. I ran down and saw the distended outline of a man through the wire-reinforced glass of the street door.

I yanked it open, and let in a flood of blinding sunlight, which backlit the shock of white hair that crowned Sebastian Santos.

# Chapter Thirty-Nine

Santos looked over my shoulder and up into the building. 'Miss Fernandes, isn't it? I don't think we've had the pleasure.'

I saw Ruth caught in Santos's gaze, halfway down the stairs behind me.

'Wait for me upstairs,' I told her.

'No,' she said.

Santos tried to move past me and over the threshold, but I forced him back. To see him a free man in the street, in an expensive suit, a cashmere tie, at liberty thanks to me, filled me with disgust. And yet, I couldn't help remembering what Ellen had told me about witness protection, the cartels, his children.

'Don't you want to introduce me to the rest of your family?' he asked.

'Why are you here?'

'I would have phoned, but do you remember I made a promise not to phone you again if you lit the candle for Anna Beth? All I wish to do today is to consult with my lawyer.'

'Get out.'

'No,' Ruth protested behind me. 'Maybe he knows—'

I spun on her, saying, 'Don't—'

'—where Francis is.'

Santos smiled faintly. 'Your brother has . . . disappeared himself?'

'It's nothing to do with you.'

'But it is,' he said. 'It is if you are true to your word.'

'What word?'

'That you were going to see me in hell.'

A white saloon passed behind him, going down towards the river. An old green van drove the other way. On the opposite side of the street, the photocopy and print shop opened for business. I stood with him in my doorway, knowing that, much as I detested the man, I had to speak to him. He followed my glance to the shop over the road.

'You know,' he said, 'you'll never find him, not if he doesn't want you to. Knowing your brother as I've come to know him, I'm certain that he is nothing if not resourceful.'

'You don't know Francis at all,' Ruth said from behind me.

'Do you, Miss Fernandes? My little Isabella once had this infected ear, when we were in hiding, and I remember her screaming through the night in pain, "Papa, I want to die. I want to die, Papa." What do you do when your loved ones are in pain? I think Francis has been in pain for a while.'

'Wait down by the river. Then we'll talk.'

I closed the door and ushered Ruth up into the flat, all the while trying to think what my next move should be.

'What are you going to do?' Ruth asked.

'Make him an offer.'

'He won't listen to reason.'

'It's not going to be a reasonable offer,' I said.

I found Santos standing by the railings at the bottom of Cable Street, bending right over and looking down into the muddy swirl of the morning tide.

'You must have seen many mornings like this on patrol,' he said as I led him into the cobbled alleys near the fish market. I realised that he had plucked away most of the hairs in his bushy black eyebrows, so that now they were two sleek black lines,

almost as if they had been drawn by a pencil. 'This sceptred isle. This watery place. Horizons unseen from the rest of the city.' He stared at me, his brows rising, his eyes suddenly aflame. 'Like from a dirty cell.'

'I got you out, didn't I? What are you going to do now?'

'Enjoy my money,' he said. 'It's all I have left.'

'I know they betrayed your family.'

He heightened his voice uncharacteristically, so that I saw his rounded teeth as he shouted, 'My family is *not* your concern.'

'You've made mine yours. We have to sort this out.'

'How? I have unfinished business with your brother.'

'You want to enjoy your money. I want my family to be shot of you. I want you out of Frankie's life.'

'And who wants Miss Fernandes?'

'Leave her out of it.'

'I'll speak about *anything* I wish,' Santos said.

I began walking quickly, and Santos followed me, speaking in breathy sentences, unused to the exercise since his arrest.

'We can never reach an accommodation,' he said.

'Try,' I replied.

'You think it's that simple? Two men talking? What about righteous indignation? What about my lawyer's desire to see me in hell?'

'What you did to Telfer and Sorensen sickens me. But I know what you lost. So I'm willing to deal. A one-off offer, no haggling about terms.'

'This I can't wait to hear.'

'You leave my family alone and I let you live, Santos. I don't care if I go down for life, if you touch any of them I will hunt you down and I will kill you. Without hesitation. Without a second thought.'

'You're lying. You've never killed a man.'

'These are the only people I love. Think what you would do if you had one last chance to protect your family.' I saw the change coming over his face as I finally made a telling connec-

tion, plugging into the worst trauma of his own life. 'That's what I'm prepared to do now,' I said.

He turned sharply away from me, and was silent for almost a minute. I saw his delicate hand going up to his face; his shoulders heaved, and I wondered if this man who had brutally taken two lives was now crying. I gave him time to think of his family, delivered in black plastic bin-liners.

'What happened to Telfer and Sorensen is between you and the authorities.'

His shoulders heaved again. His other hand rose to his face.

'Santos?'

He turned back; I saw that he was laughing. 'You don't make conditions for me. I make conditions for you. You want to see me in hell? I'll show you real hell. I'll teach you what it is to live in fear, counsel. Come after me and none of your family will ever be safe again. Ever.'

'My family has not harmed you.'

'But it can,' he said.

'How?'

'As long as your brother remains free, I cannot be safe,' he said. 'He will always be the way the authorities can get to me. I'll never have peace. The threat will always be there. Unless.'

'What?'

'Unless you have a little talk with big brother and come to the inescapable conclusion that sacrificing him will save the rest of you.'

I looked down; I could barely breathe.

'As long as your brother is free,' Santos said, 'I never will be. Save your father and the girl you both love – have it all, David, all to yourself. You don't know how near to a financial genius your brother is. And here are you, poor, dull, painfully mediocre little brother. Always playing the sibling Salieri to his Mozart. How it cuts you, deep inside where the world can't see you bleeding, when he effortlessly wins the praise and the love of those who should love you.

And only you know that his accolades are entirely undeserved. Well, I'm giving you a chance to end it. Think, David. Think of your father's undivided love. Total possession of the woman you adore.' He paused, and I felt his hand on my shoulder as he whispered, '*Give him to me.*'

In a blinding flash I was no longer looking at the cobbled pavings, but my body was coiling deep within, the fury exploding through my muscles and unleashing a left cross that connected perfectly and smashed Santos off his feet. The pain of my knuckle-bone jarring against his jaw shot up my arm and made me cry out. It was infinitely worse for Santos. It was as though invisible wires behind and above him had suddenly hoisted the wretched man into the air and just as suddenly dumped him on to the ground with a sickening thud. Blood oozed from his mouth.

'Why don't you kill me now?' he cried out. 'Kill me, David. Become like me. You're not better than me.'

I began to walk away, leaving Santos stranded on the ground, as people peered out of windows to see what the noise was. A young couple, arm in arm, stopped and watched me.

'*You* are the madman,' Santos said, his words distorted by his rapidly numbing face, bubbles of blood forming with each word. Then he smiled, curiously, to himself, and me.

By the time I opened my street door, the semblance of a plan had begun to form in my mind. I ran up the stairs and into the flat, where Ruth stepped out of the kitchen.

'Where is he?' she asked.

'Out there. Look, this thing with Santos, it won't just end. I've got to get you all safe, then I'm going to finish it.' Suddenly I thought of Dad, languishing in a hospital bed. I reached into my jacket, fumbled with the clutter of the pockets until with trembling fingers I managed to snatch out my mobile. I dialled Ellen.

'Ross?' she said businesslike after two rings.

'It's David.'

'Dave, I'm in a debrief.'

'Santos is coming after us. I need your help. Dad's still in hospital and—'

'I'll get Rapid Response there, Dave. Don't worry. It's already done.'

I glanced up at Ruth. I said into the phone, 'Elles, I need you to bury someone.'

'No way on earth,' Ruth said.

'Dave?' Ellen said.

I put my hand over the mouthpiece. 'Ruth, do this for me.'

'I'm staying with you.'

'Please, do this one thing for me.'

'It's Ruth, right?' Ellen said.

'I don't want a safe house, I don't want anyone else on the force to know. Just you and me.'

'Hang on,' Ellen said. I could hear rustling as she moved, then a door slammed. 'We're alone. Dave, I've been setting up this place—'

'I don't want to know myself. Then Santos can't . . . if I'm—'

'Dave, if you're going after Santos, let me help you.'

'You will help, by securing Ruth. I'll contact you at NCS when it's over.'

Ellen said, 'This changes everything. Your old life ends if you take him down, you know that.'

'I know the alternative doesn't work for me.'

'OK, Killer, can you get to the hospital? Where are you now? – no, *don't* tell me where you are. My line's secure, but are you sure about yours?'

'See you there.'

'What about Frankie?'

'Leave him to me,' I said. When I had switched off, I rummaged in the kitchen drawers till I found a long serrated

carving knife, its blade gleaming in the daylight that had spread into the room when I opened the door. Then I thought again. I found a shorter knife, equally sharp, but with a blade of about five inches. It wouldn't bend so easily. I realised from the stabbing cases I had done; it would be a more deadly weapon.

I gave it to Ruth. 'Keep this,' I told her.

'I don't want to leave you.'

'It won't be for long.'

I led her down the stairs to the office. We edged through the mess until I reached the spot where my floor safe was buried. The carpet above it was covered in soil from the plants which tumbled into a pile when I lifted the green lining below. I got the combination wrong at first.

'Take a breath,' Ruth said.

I did, got it right. I reached down into the cavity below the floorboards and pulled out the red-and-white checked dishcloth. The gun, in pristine condition, was wrapped within it.

'Jesus, David,' Ruth said.

'Insurance, from prizefighting days.' I'd kept it well oiled in the interim, cleaning it when necessary. It was a Browning nine-millimetre pistol, the high-power version used by the SAS. The nine-mill. was reliable. I vowed that it would never leave me till Santos and I were finished.

I checked the clip, and instinctively blew away a microscopic piece of dust on one of the bullets.

I heard the noise at the same time as she did, and jacked the clip into place, priming the gun. The bell was ringing. I rushed to the door and glanced down the stairs, seeing the dark silhouette through the coarse glass of the street door.

I went to the intercom, and said as calmly as I could, 'Who is it?'

'Delivery,' the man's voice came back.

'Not Santos,' I whispered to Ruth. Back into the intercom, 'What is it?'

'For David Kilkenny,' the man said.

'What?'

'A surprise.'

I glanced back through the door and saw that the man was carrying something across his arms. I made out his body leaning forward as he craned his neck to speak into the intercom outside.

'Leave it there,' I called down the stairs.

'You've got to sign.'

'Then take it away.'

I saw the man shake his head and heard him mumble something as he gently laid whatever he was carrying on the ground outside the door.

'Is this what it's going to be like?' Ruth asked.

'It'll always be like this, unless I deal with Santos,' I replied.

I edged down the stairs, the gun held in front of me in both hands, its barrel pointing at the door.

'What if it's some kind of explosive?' Ruth said

'Not his style.'

'Let me look out of the window.'

I transferred the gun to my left hand, then opened the street door with my right.

'What is it?' Ruth asked breathlessly.

Colours on the pavement. Vivid blood reds.

'What?'

I looked at flowers, deep red flowers.

'There's a card,' I said.

The wind blew from the river between the buildings and ruffled the petals on the upper roses in the bouquet. I nudged the card with the tip of the gun, then noticed a car turning into the road from the north side. I quickly drew the gun back inside, dipped and pulled out the card.

It was a small white oblong in an unsealed envelope.

The envelope fluttered to the floor as I read.

'What does it say?' Ruth asked.

I looked up at her and nodded.

'What?' she cried, and ran down the stairs.

The card said, '*Love from the Crimson Lady*'

I handed her the card and said, 'I know where Frankie is.'

# Chapter Forty

I glanced in the rear-view to check as best I could that the cars behind were not following us. Ruth lay across the back seats, covered with a blanket as if she were sick, but she found it impossible to stay still and lifted herself upright. When we neared the hospital, we slid in behind the convoy of marked police cars which punched a hole through the city traffic with a blare of sirens and a blizzard of swirling lights. The police cars fanned out around the entrance, and officers, mainly in uniform, exited. There were already AFOs, staring at the rooftops opposite with narrowed eyes to reduce the glare. Ellen had been as good as her word.

We ran towards the sliding glass doors which began to open automatically as my weight touched the large pressure pad in front of them. The AFOs blocked my way with their semi-automatic rifles.

'Only emergencies,' one officer said.

'It's *my* father,' I shouted. When this appeared to have no impact, I went on, 'It's why you're here, for Christ's sake. Conor Kilkenny. Armed response ordered by DI Ross?'

'Let them through – now,' came Ellen's order from the foyer.

The AFOs stood down their weapons. Lagging a short distance behind Ellen, favouring his injured leg, was Train.

'Your father's doing fine,' Ellen told me, escorting both Ruth

and myself past the reception desk, manned by two bewildered administrators. 'Can Mr Nelson take Ruth through? I need to speak to you.'

'I want to see Dad,' I said. But from the look in her eyes, the grim cast, I knew that it would have to wait. 'See you in a minute,' I told Ruth and Train.

They disappeared down the corridor, following the arrowed signs for the intensive care unit, while Ellen and I went into a huge glass atrium full of palm trees and the toy houses of a children's play area. Because of the emergency, it had been evacuated.

'I can't do it,' Ellen said to me. 'I mean look after Ruth myself. Dave, we've got a new generation of safe house. They're not like the old dossholes. These are sanitised, debugged, with untraceable chains of custody, bought by shelf companies. All illegal, in the name of the law. They're called "cold" sites.'

'I don't trust the force. I do trust you.'

'I don't want that pressure. What if something—?'

'Elles, I can't hear this right now. I just need you to do what you're good at.'

'I'm not that good.'

'You're better than the rest of them put together.'

I looked at her eyes, noticing now that they were ringed with exhaustion, and I suspected that the pressure of the Boat of Horrors case and her role in it had finally marked her.

'I'm sick of the job,' Ellen said. 'Look at the Santos case. The bad guys always win. I want something more, something better. I deserve it, for fuck's sake. You were right. It's all just a game. And I'm sick of being on the losing side. I want to win for a change.'

'What the hell did I win, Elles? The release of a murderer on to the streets and a ring of steel protecting my sick father. I wouldn't dump this on you if there was anyone else. But there isn't, Elles.'

We went down a succession of corridors until we saw more armed officers guarding the entrance to the ICU. Rooms ran off

to both sides; I heard machines bleeping out the heartbeats of patients clinging to life. I overtook Ellen, dread mounting inside me. The patients in the first rooms seemed more dead than alive. I couldn't believe that my father had been placed among them by medical experts.

From behind, Ellen instructed the armed guards to let me pass. I entered my father's room, little more than a cubicle, with the shade over the window pulled down. Ruth sat at the side of the high bed. Dad's limp fingers cradled in her palm. Train stood behind her, next to the machine feeding my father oxygen through a transparent face mask.

This was my doing.

His helpless eyes stared over the mask and made him appear like a frightened child.

Ruth stood up when she saw me enter, clearing the way for me to sit next to him. I went closer and sank into the plastic chair. 'When I boxed in the force, you were always in my corner. After the fights, remember those buckets of ice you brought me for the bruising in my hands? It's not my hands that are bruised now, Dad.' I paused. 'I need you in my corner again.'

His eyes blinked, then again, before I realised that he wanted me to take off his mask.

'Sure?' I asked.

He blinked. I let the mask rest below his chin, held there by the loose elastic fittings.

'Dad, I'm so—'

He nodded.

'Santos is coming after all of us.'

'Frankie?' he asked

I bent down close to his ear. 'I know where,' I whispered.

He blinked again and let out an exhausted sigh; his chest sank alarmingly. He winced with the pain.

'He spoke to you before he left?' I asked. My father didn't respond to this, which I took to be a confirmation. 'What did he tell you?'

At first no words came out, just a hiss, like a slow puncture. Closing his bluish lips, he breathed in through his nose, held the air in his chest, then tried again, a look of determination all over his face, the steely eyes fixed in the way I remembered from my childhood, when he spoke about criminals he had run down.

'Wants to . . . to tell you himself.'

A tear rolled from the inside corner of his left eye, following the track of his nose and stopping as it reached the upward curl of his top lip.

'We should have been better sons, Dad. We will be,' I promised him.

His fingers tensed and then relaxed in mine. A nurse came through the door. 'No more talking,' she ordered. 'That oxygen mask should be on.'

She replaced the mask and his watery eyes stared up at me. Just when I thought he was fading, he winked at me with his right eye.

'We'll be beering in the bar soon, Dad,' I said.

I left the hospital alone, not wanting anyone with me as I went in search of Frankie. I knew that if I was being watched or followed, it would be easier to lose surveillance operating by myself. I called on everything I had learned about moving observations both in my time on the force and in the cases I had pursued as a lawyer.

The last thing I wanted to do was to lead Santos or anyone he had hired to Frankie. Because that was the only place I was going, all I could think about, even though it would be risky to make my way to his hideout. But I was convinced that, by sending the flowers, Frankie was telling me this was the very risk he wanted me to take.

I was going to my brother.

I was going to Gosburn.

# Chapter Forty-One

Before I left, I asked Train to guard Dad as best he could, act as a last line of defence behind the police. If there was one man I'd want fighting beside me in the trench, it was Train.

'No one's getting past the Train,' he assured me.

'I know,' I replied.

'Not even past the slimline, undernourished Night Train Nelson you see before your eyes.'

We both laughed.

'Had to say what I had to say,' he told me. 'Hope you didn't think I was interfering.'

'You were. I'm glad you did. You'll be all right here?'

'Sure. This nurse overheard me humming "Sunrise, Sunset". From *Fiddler on the Roof*? She's in the hospital choral society. They would kill for a good bass. So—'

'What's she look like?'

Train smiled his gap-toothed smile. 'Like she doesn't sprinkle cannabis on her cornflakes.'

'Good luck.'

'Keep your jab out, Davey.'

I made my way to the hospital kitchens, all shiny metal surfaces and boiling vats of vegetables. I rushed through before anyone had time to challenge me, and chose one of the two delivery vans about to depart as the first leg of my journey to my

brother. Only a small bribe to the delivery man, twenty pounds for a 'drink' and no questions asked, as I took a ride out of the hospital in the refrigerated back of the vehicle. I'd been in many meat wagons in my time on the force. This was the real thing.

He dropped me off at the Tube, not the nearest one, but the station after that. From there I took the Underground to the airport. At Heathrow, I used the cashpoint machine outside International Departures to draw five hundred pounds, my limit for one day's withdrawal. I knew that at some stage I would need to use plastic, and if my credit details had been 'acquired' by Santos, then he would have his first clue in tracing me. I couldn't use my own car, it was too high a risk – too many opportunities for it to be bugged and followed. So I tried to make some kind of virtue out of the necessity, create a false trail. Hint that I might have left the country.

I hailed a black cab on one of the access roads behind the terminal. At first he was unsure, the protocol being that cabbies could only pick up from the official ranks outside the terminals, but the promise of ten pounds on top of any fare eased his worries about the red tape, which he promptly set about rubbishing.

The cab dropped me near the North Circular, and a stretch of second-hand car dealers. I'd done a case representing one of these retailers, prosecuted by Trading Standards for selling 'ringed' vehicles: cars that were reconstituted from write-offs, spare parts stripped from stolen vehicles. The cars here were dangerous, dubious yet cheap and untraceable. It was these latter two qualities that I now needed.

I had no time to haggle, and spotted a rust-bucket old BM, a 5 series with big engine and bodywork so cratered it looked like the surface of Mars. I drove it once around the back lot, checked under the bonnet and handed over most of my remaining notes. I insisted on a full tank thrown in for the asking price – enough to get me to Gosburn.

In a perfect world, I would have waited until the rush hour

before I tried to leave London, since it was infinitely more difficult to keep track of a marked car at peak times. It would have been even better to have waited until night. But I had to make my move; I had to get to Frankie.

I did what I could to ensure there was no tail. I made as many right turns as possible, since it was more obvious if a following car turns across the oncoming traffic after you. I did two 'circuits', sets of four consecutive left-hand turns, completing a block. At times as I drove out of town, I slowed almost to a stop in the inside lane, putting on my emergency lights as if I were about to stall. At other times I jumped red lights, hooted on all sides. When I found two roundabouts in close proximity, I did my final check. I drove to the farthest one, doubled back, repeated the process.

By the time I passed over the M25, I was as satisfied as I could be that I hadn't been followed. Which is not to say that I couldn't be wrong.

The traffic thinned as fields and pylons and reservoirs unreeled in front of me. Blue-signed motorway led to green A road and then single-carriage trunks. The light began to fail and the smouldering sun straddled the horizon to the west like a bonfire about to go out. When I passed the outskirts of Gosburn, I became conscious of what I had always known: I didn't know where to meet Frankie.

The quiet lakeside community was largely dormant until the season began with the better weather, and I had a chronic moment of self-doubt as I faced up to the fact that I could have been totally wrong. Frankie might have sent the flowers, but he might not have been in Gosburn. In fact, given the elusive way he had behaved with me from the very moment he returned from New York, he might have offered the suggestion that he was in Gosburn as deliberate disinformation. My doubts grew as clouds blacked out the sun and the weather closed in.

The trees were mainly fir and pine, not common in that area of the south of the country. Many buildings were in disrepair, or

boarded up more permanently. A few were newly painted, and I was envious of the warm glow emitted by fires and lights from within. I saw satellite dishes pointed at the concrete skies above. They seemed wrong to me, intruding into my memories of the place. I believed this Gosburn should be trapped in the same twenty-year time warp as my memories of it. I supposed that here people must surf the Internet, doing what other Net addicts did, swapping useless information with anoraks in Wagga Wagga, that kind of thing. People in this Gosburn played the lottery and used mobile phones. The only thing that was the same was the lake, which I glimpsed sometimes between the buildings, or through the ribbon of firs.

I drove slowly through the streets of bungalows, with their ill-tended lawns and small sensible cars parked on driveways. I turned, then turned again, and suddenly the street ran right to the edge of the lake.

With the sight of the lake itself, the drab stretch of deep water where Frankie and I had seen one of our childhood friends drown, I knew that neither of us would ever have returned here except in the direst emergency. I stopped the car and opened the ill-fitting door, which would not shut again properly. In ten further steps, I was on the very edge of the lake. The wind was stronger here, fanning off the water and making the curtain of trees that ringed the lake come alive in a slow dance of upper branches. The water was black and reflected nothing. I looked into it anyway, squatting down and looking out across its surface, trying to pick the spot where I'd dived under in my attempt to rescue the drowning boy. I suddenly felt that crushing weight of water above my head as I desperately tried to save my breath and free Morton. I sweated at the memory; my thigh started to tremble.

I knew that the figure at the tree line had been watching me for at least a minute.

'Frankie?' I called.

The figure didn't reply. It moved sideways from one trunk to

the next. I realised that he was attempting to get a better view back up the road. I saw a small jetty and a rowing-boat tied to it farther along the shoreline.

'Frankie, it's me,' I said.

He didn't reply. I advanced, causing the man to retreat deeper into the trees.

I stopped, saying, 'Frankie, I'm alone.'

'Open the car doors,' he called back.

'What?'

'All of them.'

I went up to the car and opened all four doors. I also opened the boot. He waited another fifteen seconds, glanced up the road again, and then slid out from the cover of the trees.

'Didn't ask you to open the boot,' he said, approaching.

'I could have a SWAT team locked up in there.'

He wore a Barbour and heavy canvas trousers and hiking boots. 'Good point,' he said.

'You really thought I'd lead people to you?'

'I thought they might not give you a choice.' He eyed the car with amused contempt. 'Think you can get that wreck started again?'

'Frankie, what the fuck are you doing here?'

'I'll explain,' he said.

We went through the woods and along a narrow, rough track that led to an increasingly familiar building. Slowly, as if the curtain that I had tried to draw over those painful years were being opened, I recognised the cottage. The door we had forced, the windows we had glanced out of that night when we were free and on the run. I stopped the car. I watched as Frankie unlocked the door, much smaller than I remembered it. A frightening dark house to a young boy on the run. Just another summer lakeside cottage, I now saw.

I picked out the spot where the police had arrested us, Frankie half asleep, me terrified that I'd never see my brother

again. I looked at the small path and the rock garden with the large stone with the name of the cottage upon it. The rock we had used to break the door.

'I know you've got questions, but we've got to use our brains,' he insisted.

'How can I? I'm the thick one. Thick as two short planks and twice as strong,' I said, throwing back at him what Dad used to say of me.

'Now who's talking bullshit?'

We were silent, standing on the threshold of the cottage, with one foot in our past and a terrible future sailing towards us.

There was a large table of coarse wood dominating the dark, low-ceilinged kitchen. On the table, covering its entire surface, was a collection of the most extravagant foods I had ever seen assembled in one place.

'Hungry?' Frankie asked.

I shook my head.

He delicately took a quail's egg out of a box of a dozen, cracked it and ate. He said, 'Only sevruga, I'm afraid,' and pointed to a bowl of caviare. Two bottles of champagne were on ice, one already opened. 'Dom '90,' he explained. 'Can't seem to get the '85 so easily any more. And they didn't have any decent Louis Roederer.'

There were cheeses breathing, and gravadlax and foie gras and marrons glacés, the feast of an overgrown adolescent let loose in Harrods food hall.

'If I'm going out, I'm going out in style.' He smiled. 'Just a little hamper I put together on the way out of town.'

I could easily picture it. My elder brother fleeing desperately from unknown enemies, stopping off at Fortnum's with his platinum card along the way.

'I can make you a sandwich,' he said. 'I've got ciabatta or this corn bread.'

'Any Irish cheddar?' I asked, suddenly feeling my stomach growl with hunger at the exotic smells.

'Don't be ridiculous.'

I dipped my fingers crudely into the middle of the foie gras and scooped up a mouthful.

'Beats that old can of beans we ate in here,' he said.

'Doesn't,' I replied.

'Yeah, you're right. I've rented the cottage since I came back from the States. I suppose I knew I'd need it one day.'

'Who does it belong to?'

'Repossessed by the building society a few years ago, apparently. The couple who had always owned it defaulted. Seems strange that it was the same owners as when we—'

We wandered into the main room, off which two bedrooms were situated. Both the bedroom doors were open. The first room was already cluttered with Frankie's jumble of designer clothes and CDs. The other room was neater, with documents and files. A computer screen pulsed blue in the gloom.

'Just a bit of work,' he said.

It was almost dark now and the fire I built imprinted our shadows on the cracking paint of the cottage walls. I asked him to remind me of the story of the Crimson Lady.

'On dark nights, only men who want to look into the face of death dare venture into the spectral pine forests around the lake at Gosburn. Because, making a grim patrol around the lake is a figure you will not see until she is suddenly upon you – like a nightmare. She carries her severed head under her arm, and speaks in the voice of the dead and undead. She has sliced off her own head at the neck, having been betrayed by her only true love, and keeps this dreadful vigil to warn all men of the duplicity of love.'

I was tired of secrets and wanted to know the truth about that drowning all those years before.

'He was in love with one of the priests,' Frankie said. 'Morton, totally against my advice, had told Father Whoever

about it. The fathers were going to tell his parents when camp was over. He couldn't face it.'

'All the boys said you were gay. You and Morton. Why didn't you say something?'

'I promised him I wouldn't,' Frankie said. 'I feel guilty telling you now.'

I sat on the sofa directly opposite him. The only light in the room was from the fire. It was easier to speak about these things in the half-light. My jacket was over the sofa arm, my gun tucked down the side of the cushions.

'Most of what I said was true. I did run up debts with one of the cartels. Santos did sort it out.'

'He killed people for you?'

'He sorted it out,' Frankie said. 'If you ask me whether I asked him to hurt a single soul, then no. I swear I did not. But if you ask whether I thought he might . . .' He paused, shook his head. 'What do you think?'

'Look, you know Santos's operations. Can you ruin him if you go on the record?'

'Him and half the Manhattan money launderers.'

'OK, so he's got to take you down for peace of mind. Tell me one thing, Frankie. Why have you never been arrested?'

'I'm going to get some foie gras,' he said.

'You'd better tell me the truth, because I'm imagining very bad things about you.'

'Like what?' he said. 'Like I murdered Telfer on the boat?'

The pieces slid into place in my mind. I didn't want to admit it to myself but there was only one explanation left as to why Frankie hadn't been arrested. But I wanted him to say it. I wanted to hear it from him.

'The NCS took me in, for Christ's sake,' he said.

'But they didn't arrest you officially. You helped them with their enquiries. Then you were released. You weren't called as a witness against Santos.'

'What could I have said?'

'Plenty. You could have testified about the hiring of the boat. And that would have been just the start. They didn't investigate you further. You were never charged with anything. Jesus, Frankie, Jesus Christ, what the hell have you done?'

'You seem to know.'

'Please tell me the truth. Why weren't you arrested?'

'I'm an informer,' he said quietly. 'I'm an informer against Santos.'

He moved towards the window and looked out at the trees, through which the lake could just be seen, reflecting a quadrant of the moon.

'Why did you do it?' I asked.

'Got caught with my hands in the till. The regulators finally caught up with me. The cartel transactions. By then Santos had sorted out the physical danger for me. But that didn't stop the regulators unravelling the transactions.'

'But what was the deal? What was in it for them? They wanted Santos, you could give them Santos in New York. Why did it all move to London?'

I could see my brother's head shaking slowly in the silvery window light. 'Santos is just one part of it,' he said.

'And the other?'

'The cartels have infiltrated law enforcement. So the authorities wanted to infiltrate the cartels. Using me. That's why I lied to you all the time. I couldn't tell any of you anything. For your own protection. If I blew my cover, the deal was off. I couldn't let anyone else know, or it was over. I had a one-way ticket to twenty years inside.'

'You used me.'

'No,' he said, 'we used Santos. Don't you see that? He thinks he used me. But I used him. I had one chance to save my life, my future. Help them get Santos. And instead of having to go on the record and be branded a grass for the rest of my life, I could . . . I mean, we could—'

'You wanted me to do the case. Always. And you wanted me

to lose it. The whole thing was a set-up from the start, wasn't it? What the hell did you tell your handlers? Oh, I have a brother who's a lawyer. I'll see to it that he does Santos's case and fucks it up because that's all he's ever done in his life, fuck up.'

'It wasn't like that.'

'You thought I would lose, didn't you?'

'I knew you were honest, and Santos had to be guilty, and if you just did your job properly—'

'You never wanted me to win?'

'No.'

'You never thought I could win?'

'No.'

'You think nothing of me, Frankie. You know that?'

'No, Davey. I admire you more than anyone in the world. Don't you see? Almost any other defence hack lawyer would be tempted by Santos's millions, could have been bought, but you were the one man in the whole of the city who I knew for a fact would never be bought for all the money in the world. God, living with what happened. Mum. Every birthday of yours a day of mourning in our house. And you never crying once, even though you knew Dad blamed you, drinking into the night, singing that song. Every time I heard 'My Wild Irish Rose', I bloody wanted to cry. I don't know how you did it. You are so much stronger than me. Yes, I thought you'd lose the case, *because* you're honest. Because that sonofabitch Santos was guilty. But you won. And I even admire you for that, even though it's royally fucked my life.'

'Why?'

'They're calling me in. Santos is out, so I've got to go on the record.'

'Then why run?'

'Because Santos was bound to try to get to me. I'm not going into witness protection. How long do you think I'd last in there?' He broke off and his head swivelled towards the door that led to the kitchen.

'Who's your handler?'

'Did you hear that?' His eyes narrowed, searching the room.

'What?'

Now I heard it. Someone next door.

'Jesus. Did we lock the door?' he whispered.

I lunged across the room for the nine-mill., but before I could reach it, the door was flung open and the armed man stood in the vacant doorway, aiming his automatic at us. I saw a flash of flame from his direction, for a bewildering moment thought he had fired, but saw that it was a reflection of the burning logs in his glasses.

Leybourne advanced.

My fingers scrambled for the nine-mill., and closed around its cold handle.

'Stay there,' Leybourne said.

'Leave him,' Frankie told him.

The gun was in my hand. I pointed it at Leybourne.

'Put it down,' Leybourne ordered.

'No,' I replied, easing off the safety catch.

Frankie said, 'Do as he says.'

'No fucking way,' I responded. 'I can take him.'

'Please,' Frankie said.

I glanced over at him, the barrel of my nine-mill. still trained on the cop. 'Why?'

'Because Leybourne's my handler,' Frankie said.

Leybourne grinned before his face settled back into its scowl. 'I told you,' he said to me, 'I was going to own both of you.'

Our guns were still trained on each other. I didn't want to lose my fix on Leybourne as I asked Frankie, 'You sure?'

'Yes,' he said.

My head filled with stills from the preceding weeks. Leybourne so publicly accosting Frankie in the court lobby after Santos's release. Was that put on, to deflect attention from the fact that Leybourne owned him? It could have been Leybourne's

fury at Frankie failing in his mission to ensure than Santos lost the committal by having me represent him. I had to go back farther. Leybourne had been there right from the start. He was the one who had come to Kilkenny's to take Frankie in. He had been over zealous all the way through. He had constantly gunned for Frankie. It was just a cover. One thing didn't fit.

'He was just seconded to NCS,' I told Frankie. The weight of the gun in my left hand extended in front of me, braced with my right, made my arm muscles begin to burn as I tried to stop it shaking.

Leybourne laughed at this, snorting. 'Tell your brother where I was seconded from,' he ordered Frankie.

'Don't make it worse,' Frankie pleaded with the detective.

'All right, where?' I asked.

'Corrupt practices,' Leybourne said.

'Bull. There's no such division.'

'Exactly.'

'I told you, they're flushing out the cartel's contacts in the force,' Frankie said.

'The fucking cartels,' Leybourne said. 'We should arrest every low life one of them for murder. Because that's what the bastards do with every wrap they peddle. Murder people – the people the addicts used to be.'

'Ellen Ross told me about your daughter,' I said.

He shook his head. 'Why am I not surprised?' He hoisted his free hand high above his head, the fingers open, showing me that the palm was empty. 'You do it,' he ordered Frankie.

'What?' Frankie asked.

'Take the photos out of my pocket.'

'What's going on?' I asked, quickly turning to Frankie and then back.

Leybourne said, 'We've just found Santos's connection.'

'What connection?' I asked.

'How he was able to set up Telfer. How he found Sorensen,' Leybourne said.

Frankie gingerly reached into Leybourne's side pocket and pulled out a series of Polaroids. I immediately recognised them as surveillance shots with digital read-outs of the time and date. Today's date.

'Oh, Jesus,' Frankie said.

'You really didn't even suspect?' Leybourne asked.

'What?' I asked, looking at Frankie.

'You played right into Santos's hands,' Leybourne said.

'Davey, what have you done?' Frankie cried, holding the Polaroid at arm's length towards me. And I saw.

Santos with Ellen.

'This is our first concrete evidence of the link between them,' Leybourne said. 'It's not enough yet. But the pieces are beginning to fit.'

I ran as fast as I could, barging past Leybourne.

'You do *nothing* without me,' he shouted.

I hammered down the paved pathway, shoving the gun into the back of my trouser-band, while I fumbled for the car keys.

Frankie ran after me, but he couldn't keep up. The car engine exploded with noise as I over-revved. Frankie banged on the windows; the BM skidded, tyres spinning as it reversed through the narrow avenue of firs.

When the BM screamed to a halt outside Ellen's flat, the police were already laying siege to her building. Two uniforms tried to bar my entry, but I barged the first out of the way and drew my gun on the second, causing him to back off. I heard another cop call for armed support on his personal radio. I didn't care.

I kicked down Ellen's door and rushed into the empty flat.

No Ellen, no Ruth.

I stormed through the flat, kicking open doors, hurling tables, while Leybourne's surveillance photo burned in my mind. Ellen and Santos together. Ellen had been just too good. Ellen now had Ruth. Santos had Ruth.

I scrambled out of the bedroom, where we'd had sex that morning, and back into the living room. The phone rang. I saw that there were fifteen messages on her answerphone. I heard sirens outside. I knew armed units would be on their way to apprehend a crazed man who had pulled a gun on the police. Me.

Ellen's voice spoke on the OGM, the Out-Going Message, clear and controlled, the voice I'd known from my first day on the force.

A click. The incoming message began recording. I knew it had to be Santos. I grabbed the receiver. But the message was pre-recorded, no doubt having already repeated itself fifteen times.

'Santos?' I shouted down the phone. The message kept coming at me, slow and restrained, looping the same four words again and again.

'*I propose a swap. I propose a swap. I propose a swap.*'

Footsteps charged up the stairs outside Ellen's flat.

I heard the screams of the armed officers in flak. I threw down my gun and followed their instructions by rote, not consciously listening to them because in my mind a loop played and replayed itself. But now only three words.

'*Frankie for Ruth, Frankie for Ruth, Frankie for Ruth.*'

# Chapter Forty-Two

It was past midnight by the time I got to the hospital. Leybourne had arrived at Ellen's flat after me and squared it with the disgruntled commander of the armed response unit, explained I was under exceptional strain. He even handed me back my nine-mill.

My father was resting at the hospital, and though I was allowed to his side, I was not permitted to wake him. I sat there for ten minutes while the heart monitor bleeped out the time. His eyes didn't open. I waited some more.

Outside, I found Train.

'Keeps asking for Ruth,' he said.

We stood in the corridor, and I glanced at the armed guards at the front door. Leybourne had assured me that they had been specially selected by his corrupt practices unit, drawn from far-flung forces around the country. I didn't trust any of them.

'I know you, Davey,' Train told me. 'You'll figure a way round this.'

'They won't hurt her, not if they want an exchange for Frankie. Why would Santos want just Frankie? Think about it, Train. Even if we gave him Frankie, would Santos be safe from the law? No way. We'd be witnesses against him. Not to the financial side, but to his demand for Frankie's surrender. We take Frankie's place as witnesses against Santos.'

Train flung up his hands. 'Then I don't understand a damn thing.'

'I'm just beginning to,' I replied. 'You OK to stay with Dad?'

'Sure, but—'

I took his arms, looked into his face. 'I might need you later.'

'What for?'

'Just trust me,' I said. 'Beginning of the twelfth.'

I returned to the cottage in the early hours, not having bothered to take any evasive action to disguise my route out of town. If I was followed, then I was past caring. If I led Santos to my brother, that was too bad. The car headlamps shone on to the ivy-covered façade of the bungalow like searchlights. I saw that Frankie was still up, in the second bedroom, hunched over one of the several computer screens he'd set up.

He opened the door to me before I knocked.

'I know what you're up to,' I said.

'I can explain,' he began.

I pushed him into the second bedroom and dumped him next to the chair in front of the screens. I tried to make sense of the constantly changing financial information being downloaded by satellite from all corners of the world. Numbered secret accounts, currency spot rates, commodity forward prices, soundbites from finance ministers in emerging market countries.

'How'd you know?' he asked.

'You fucking idiot,' I replied. 'You risked Ruth, for this?'

'It wasn't me who put Ruth at risk. You gave Ruth to Ellen Ross.'

'Santos doesn't care about you as a witness,' I said. 'You've got something he wants. It's on these screens.'

The data constantly changed, numbers whirred, adjusted, flashed with breaking news. On some VDUs the information was white, on others green, yellow, blue. The dark room was a kaleidoscope of coloured numbers, shifting chaotically.

'You've stolen Santos's money,' I said. 'He had that five hundred million dollars. How much have you taken?'

He sighed, shook his head. 'You don't know what you're talking about.'

'Don't I? Even if you surrendered to Santos, he'd know I'd come after him. He could never live in peace. Not like that. He isn't after you. He's after what you've got.'

'That's what you believe?'

'That's what I know about you, Frankie. Always on the make. Always selling. Since we were kids, some scam or other. You've stolen Santos's money, haven't you?'

He shook his head.

I slipped down from the chair and lowered my face to look deep into his eyes. 'What have you stolen, Frankie? How much have you stolen from him? He's got Ruth. She's having your child. Now I've got to know. How much have you stolen?'

'All of it,' he said.

Electronic bleeping behind me. A fax spewed out of the machine.

'Ignore it,' Frankie said. 'It's just Rio.'

I turned back to him. 'All?'

'Every single penny and cent,' he said.

'You crazy fuck.'

'Really?' he said defiantly, with the superiority that had driven me wild since childhood. 'I'm the crazy one, am I?'

'You just signed Ruth's death warrant,' I said.

'How was I to know that you'd place Ruth into the hands of the cop who's Santos's secret weapon? I was supposed to know that, was I?'

'What did you think would happen when Santos was released? He was bound to go after you or the family.'

'I'd covered my tracks. I mean, I thought I had. I'd replaced the real balances in his accounts with virtual money, with cybercash. I thought it would take weeks for him to discover it. They're restricted accounts. They take time to access offshore.

He shouldn't have got in so quickly. By then, I thought we'd all be safe.'

'Then why'd you disappear?'

'Because I'm tracking the balances,' he replied. 'They're moving. He's getting in.'

'So you ran? To save yourself?'

'*No*,' Frankie said. 'To save us all. Listen to what I'm telling you.'

'What?'

'That I trusted you,' he said.

'Me?'

'To protect Dad and Ruth. You and Train – if anyone could do it, you two could.'

'While you run off with five hundred million?'

'No.' He paused, then said, 'There's only four hundred and eighty million left, anyway. Markets have moved. Don't you see? When he got out, he was always coming after me, he was always going to kill me. I knew too much. Look, he knows the most basic rule of economics: money equals power. That's it. That's all you need to know. If he couldn't get me, he'd get the rest of you. How could we stop him? Could the police? I think you know the answer to that. So how?'

Frankie got to his feet, empowered by the force of his reasoning and feeling stronger as his plan of intellectual battle filled the room. 'I'll tell you how,' he said. 'By the power of money. Do you know how powerful four hundred and eighty million is? It can buy you cabinet politicians, police squads, second-hand weapons of mass destruction, islands and satellites.'

'So just how would this money stop Santos?'

'It might not have. But it was our best shot. If we used it cleverly. The genius is in the simplicity,' he said, overexcited with the daring of his scheme. 'I figured we'd live – what? Forty more years give or take. That's, say, four hundred and eighty months. So if I paid him back one million a month for not touching any of us, then we had a shot at being safe. Then I thought a mill a

month, that's not enough. But multiply it by five. A cool five million bucks a month, if none of us is so much as approached, and he's back in the game. OK, the cash would last about eight years – actually more, since I could invest the balance in the meantime, not even taking into account compound interest. But he's got sixty million a year for doing what? Nothing at all. And in the meantime, I could buy myself a new life.'

'You can't buy everything.'

'I know you don't like it, but most things in life aren't there to be earned, but bought and sold. That's how it goes. And if I could buy myself a new life, and buy all of you safety, then why not?'

'So why hasn't Santos gone with this little scheme?'

'Because he got Ruth from your mate Ellen,' he said, annoyed that his dream package had been ruined. 'Look, I'm sorry. All this is my fault. All of it. But now Santos holds the cards. We have no option, do we? I'll surrender to Santos with the money. It's Ruth's only hope. Why should he accept my scheme when he's already got what we want?'

I glanced at the ring of screens surrounding me and, despite everything my brother had said, I burned inside with guilt, knowing that I would always hold myself responsible for handing Ruth to Santos.

'How certain are you that Santos is really motivated by the money?' I asked Frankie.

'Totally. Why?'

I kept looking at the screens as the idea came to me. I believed what Train had told me in the hospital, had to keep believing it – that Ruth was still unharmed. But I was utterly convinced that a man like Santos could not be bought off by schemes and money arrangements. I knew another side of the world to Frankie. The world I lived in was driven by passions other than just greed. I had defended enough murderers, obsessives and psychopaths to know that men like Santos could not be called off. He would have to be stopped.

'How easily can you access your accounts?' I asked.

Frankie slid into the seat in front of the screens. 'Step into my office,' he said. 'Know what the shortest distance is between A and B? And no, before you say a straight line, think bigger, think cosmic. The shortest distance between A and B is when A *is* B. When you bend space.' He tapped the keyboard, scrolled with the mouse, then sat back. 'Want to get into my banks? Here are my banks. This is my wormhole. This is my way in. These are my accounts. Impressed?' He glanced around, looking for the approval and praise he had received all his life.

'Put it all in one account,' I said.

'What?'

'Do it. Just one account. Everything.'

'We're not supposed to do anything without Leybourne,' Frankie said.

'Fuck Leybourne,' I told him.

I thought of the best way to contact Santos. I would have one final chance to take him out.

# Chapter Forty-Three

As I rang Ellen's mobile number, I wondered whether her last-minute cold feet about secreting Ruth was a sign of her doubts about involvement with Santos. No, more likely it was a grimly calculating ploy on her part, reverse psychology, to ensure that whatever else I did, I would insist that she look after Ruth. I realised that her involvement with Santos must have gone way back. I had won the case because of Ellen. She had 'blown up' in court deliberately. My exposing of her fabricated 'confession' poisoned the rest of the evidence in the case. She was Santos's Trojan horse.

'Yes?' she said, answering.

'It's me.'

'You won't be able to trace me through the call. Cellphone tracking only works properly if I'm on the move, Dave.'

I tried to imagine her, Santos next to her, Ruth tied or under guard. 'Why do it, Elles?' I asked.

'You always told me the force was a pile of shit,' she said. 'I found out my own way. When Jack Telfer raped me and the force I'd given my life to didn't want to know.'

*Did Jack Telfer get you? Depends on your definition of get.*

'Telfer even boasted about having me. Taking me.'

*It's more personal than you could possibly imagine.*

'What happened to Santos's family was wrong. Jack laughed

about it, Dave. He laughed. And you know, I felt he was laughing at my Pete and at me. Telfer and Sorensen knew the kinds of thing the cartels would do to Santos's wife and kids. The cartels love torturing children. I know you're not going to tell me the force would have done anything about it, because you know you told the truth at the corruption hearings, you know they don't want to hear that kind of truth.'

'But you joined because you thought you could do better.'

'I was wrong. I can't. Not staying in the force. But I can make a difference. Like this.'

'Even if it means kidnapping Ruth?'

'Dave, nothing will happen to her, I swear. So long as you give him the money.'

'So here's the truth. You're doing it for the money.'

'For some money. That's one part of it. Only a part. I need to make a new start. Everything in my life's fucked.'

'Ask Santos where all his money is, Elles. I would ask him now, because I'm sitting at a computer screen and I can see a flashing bottom line, which says four hundred and eighty million dollars and change.'

A rustling over the air. Ellen must have put her hand over the mouthpiece since I could only hear mumbling. Finally, Santos came on.

'Counsel?' he said.

'I want to speak to Ruth.'

I heard steps across a hard floor, possibly wooden.

'David,' Ruth gasped into the phone.

She was cut off.

'You see, she is alive,' Santos said. 'For the moment.'

'I want to deal,' I said.

'I'm always prepared to listen to a business proposition. As your brother knows.'

'We meet. You get the money, I get Ruth.'

Santos put the phone nearer Ruth. I heard the rustle of material, a gag.

'David, don't do it,' she cried out.

'Do you remember the body of Jack Telfer – what remained of Telfer's body – when I had finished? Can you imagine what I will . . . do to your Ruth? Do you know how much surgical waste the human body can be reduced to?'

He did something to her and she cried out.

'Leave her,' I said, even as I imagined incinerated flesh, dead eyes. Life growing day by day inside Ruth.

'I don't want to hurt her,' Santos said. 'Don't make me.'

'We've put every single dollar you own into one account. A Swiss security-verifiable. I think you know my brother can do it. I give you the account number and password and you give me Ruth.'

'Then what?'

'Then we all take our chances. They won't be able to use Frankie against you if they can't find you. You're astute enough. They won't find you.'

'You bargain well, counsel,' Santos said.

'Runs in the family,' I responded. 'One deal. Tonight. Settle everything. Your call.'

It took a minute for Santos to reply. All he said was, 'Agreed.'

I told him where the meet was to be, and we both knew that I wouldn't involve the police. We both knew that without the slightest hesitation Santos would put a bullet through Ruth's eyes if the police were called in. I instructed him to bring a laptop with satellite modem access, and to have a secure account set up in any bank he wished. That left us with about twelve hours until the meet that night.

Frankie slept at one stage during this, just before midday, after he had piled the $480 million into one secure Swiss account, accessible to whoever had the account number and code. He slept only for thirty minutes. It was enough.

Enough time to make my call. Not to the police. But to Train.

# Chapter Forty-Four

They wheeled him in as it got dark. Dad refused to see us from his bed, so Train took over from the young nurse and completed the journey to the visitors' room where Frankie and I waited. His head was locked a few degrees off kilter, so that he seemed to be constantly pushing his right ear forward to hear a little better. Frankie and I rushed up to the chair and kissed him on the cheek. We pulled chairs to the middle of the room, where Train had stopped. I took Dad's left hand. It was cold and still and bony, like the foot of a dead bird.

'I'd better go,' Train said.

'No, please,' I pleaded.

'There's this pretty young paramedic in casualty,' he said.

We laughed and he stayed, sitting in a chair against the wall, watching the three Kilkenny boys trying to face up to the truth.

'R-Ruth?' Dad gasped out, his voice distorted.

Frankie and I looked at each other, and I was about to tell him a version Frankie and I had agreed when my father added, 'The *truth*.'

I said, 'Santos has got her, but we're going to get her back.'

His eyes looked from me to Frankie, back again. They filled with tears. He closed them, unable to look at these sons who had allowed such a thing.

'Dad, we've got one shot. I'm going now. I'm going to get her back.'

I told my father everything. About the deal I had arranged with Santos, how I was going to meet him and exchange the account number and code for Ruth.

At the end of it, Frankie announced, 'I'm going too.'

'No way,' I replied. 'This is me and Santos.'

'Santos isn't that stupid. What if he changes his mind out there? What are you going to do? What if he says he wants me as well as the code? He won't give up Ruth. Then what are you going to do? You'll see her face, you'll look into her eyes. How do you negotiate that? If I'm there and he wants me too—'

'No,' I said.

'It just gives us one more option. Dad, tell him.'

We waited for his judgment. We wanted him to tell us what to do.

'My boys,' he finally said, flexing his fingers in our hands. 'I thought . . . I thought I saw . . . your mother.'

It was all he said. I realised then how close he had come to dying; when his heart began to fail he had seen that other shore where his wife was still young and waited for him in silence.

Frankie wanted to talk to Dad alone, and as Train and I left that small waiting room it became a confessional. Frankie sat in front of the only confessor who mattered in his life and sought a son's absolution from his father.

It gave me the chance to speak again to Train.

Frankie and I approached the river on foot. The visibility was deteriorating all the time as the fog crawled up the estuary from the sea. The city behind us disappeared. It looked as if the clouds had been punctured and were crashing to the ground all around us. They dissolved into the river as they fell, then boiled up again as icy steam.

The warehouses around the deserted wharves were locked

and empty, unreal lumps dropped into this grey, swirling place. At times, when the fog billowed, the river would disappear, and then all I could hear was its slow beating against the quay walls, the breathing of an immense creature just beyond our view.

I had the nine-mill. and the code, written by Frankie on a yellow Post-it, now folded away in my pocket. Frankie had his laptop and satellite phone, his mobile office, his wormhole into the world's banking system. Santos would bring a PC too. He could verify that the funds were in the numbered account we gave him. He could check that all his $480 million was there. But he couldn't touch a single cent of it without the code in my pocket.

Frankie didn't have a gun. Train and I could have used our contacts in the short time before the meet to have obtained one for him. He wouldn't have been much good with it, probably would have been more dangerous to all of us with a loaded gun in his hand. But the final argument was the winner. This was not going to be a firefight. The moment the guns went off, Ruth was dead. We both knew it.

As we had waited in the hospital for the time to pass, I had stared again and again at the code numbers, incredulous that this string of sixteen digits, no larger than a credit card number, could open the way to such vast funds. I prayed that these four groups of four numbers would save our family.

We passed the last warehouse and ahead of us the quay stretched out into the river. The fog settled and twisted and curled along the wooden platform, obscuring the end so that the construction appeared like an unfinished bridge. I took the nine-mill out of my trouser-band.

'What if he ambushes us?' Frankie said, glancing around, though we couldn't see more than four or five car lengths. He screwed up his eyes to see better. The fog settled in our hair; we breathed fog. 'They could just pick us off,' he whispered.

'Then he wouldn't get the code.'

'But they could shoot us and take the Post-it off you.'

'Santos wouldn't think we would be stupid enough to write it down.'

'But we were stupid enough—'

'It'll be all right,' I tried to reassure him.

'I can't see a fucking thing. How'd you know this is the right quay?'

'Because I worked the river,' I replied.

We paced small circles, back to back, at the beginning of the quay. I pointed the gun out into the wall of steaming grey; Frankie held the laptop across his chest.

'Think we should have involved Leybourne?' he asked.

'Nope.'

'What if Santos doesn't come?'

'He'll come,' I said.

Frankie was silent for a while. Finally he said, 'Do you blame me?'

'No, Frankie, I blame the Catholic fathers for not teaching you the difference between right and wrong. What the hell do you think?'

'And I blame you back,' he said.

'Good, you dishonest little shit.'

'Fine, you big bloody do-gooder.'

We moved along the platform, so that now the river was on both sides of us, rising and falling slowly. I tried not to look down, but couldn't help it, and saw between the small gaps in the wood that the water was only a couple of feet below us. For a horrifying instant, I imagined Sorensen's face staring up at me, strings of flesh torn from his cheeks by the river scavengers hanging off it.

'What do we do now?' Frankie asked, hunching his shoulders, stepping up and down quickly with his patent leather shoes, trying to keep warm.

'We wait.'

'Fucking brilliant plan, Davey.'

I heard a car engine approaching in the near-distance. Frankie

looked at me, his eyes peeled wide with fear. 'I'm not scared of dying,' he said. 'It's living. That's what's always scared the shit out of me.'

'We'll finish this now.'

We hugged each other. My arms crossed over his back, so that I could see just the tip of the loaded nine-mill. appearing over his shoulder. For the only time I could remember in my life, my brother lightly kissed me on the cheek. Just once.

'No more selling,' he said.

'No,' I replied. 'Let's get Ruth.'

The engine died. Doors slammed beyond us in the mist. Footsteps clattered on the stone of the quayside. Still I could see no one, nothing, except the banks of fog, blotting out the city lights, separating us from everything and everyone, except Santos.

The voice came through the haze. Santos's voice.

'Get to the end of the quay.'

Frankie looked at me helplessly. He didn't know what to do. I was glad I hadn't got him a gun. I flicked my head, began retreating farther up the platform, farther into the river. We were cut off anyway. It didn't matter how far we went. The deal remained the same.

Frankie slipped, skidded; his foot gave way, and I caught him. The damp wood of the platform beneath. His bloody leather soles. Jesus.

We made our way farther along the platform, Frankie beyond me, nearer the end of the quay. I went backward, covering our retreat with the gun, not seeing anything except the liquid fog closing in on us. The noise of the river increased. The lapping at the stone walls of the quayside gave way to a gushing below our feet. We were reaching the edge. Frankie stopped, could go no farther. I glanced quickly as far as I could into the river, saw the power of its current, felt it in the quickening of the breeze, the vibration of the platform this far out. The current ran in the opposite direction to the incoming fog. The fog from the sea, the current running back into it.

Dizzying, confusing. I was frightened enough for both of us, tried not to show it.

Steps approached us along the platform. I strained my eyes, shoulder to shoulder with my brother, but still saw nothing. The tension was a vice around my head. I suffered from a kind of snow blindness, all colours and shapes washed out by the fog.

He appeared first.

I made out Santos's face. The black eyebrows, the albino hair. He had a gun in his hand. It was a .45, a new model. He held it in front of him, pointed directly at me. A laptop was in his other hand. Aluminium, state of the art.

Two figures, their outlines, just behind him, still shrouded from my view.

'Closer,' I said.

He obliged. I heard mumbling. Ellen holding Ruth. Ruth handcuffed, gagged, shaking her head. Ellen packing too. Possibly a .38 special. I could have been wrong.

'Are you hurt?' I said to Ruth.

She shook her head.

'This won't take long,' I told her. She nodded, despite her fear.

'We all understand the deal,' I said.

Santos said, 'Yes.'

I nodded to Frankie and he squatted, summoned up the account on his screen. I heard the speed-dialling of the cellular, the clicking of the in-built modem over the rushing of the water beneath our feet.

'I'm in,' Frankie said.

'Haven't you got anything to say to me, Dave?' Ellen asked.

'Nothing you haven't been telling yourself,' I said. 'I keep thinking of that young girl coming down in the middle of the night to find police officers playing cards and drinking beer instead of looking for her brother.'

'I'm no longer that girl,' she said.

'I wonder if you believe that.' I turned the nine-mill. on

Santos. 'You know this is not fake money. Would we have any chance of ending this if it was?'

'You know the answer to that,' Santos said.

'So you know it's not fake. It's not a phantom account. It's your money. You've got what we want. I think we have the same.'

I used the bottom of my shoe to push the laptop around, so that it pointed at Santos. The eerie blue of the screen created an electronic shroud around it in the fog. Santos advanced a pace, another. Saw the bottom line. His eyes dilated at the sum.

'Four hundred and eighty?' he said.

'Markets have moved,' I replied. 'Now is your account set?' His eyes were still fixed on his money buried in an account only we could access. It was right there in front of him. 'You can almost taste it, can't you?' I said.

'The account is ready,' he said.

'We'll transfer any amount you wish under a million into your account. You name the figure. You'll see it on your laptop in seconds.

'Why?' Ellen asked.

'So it can't be faked,' he snapped, as if to a child.

'Fuck you,' Ellen told him.

I tried to swallow, a bitter taste. 'Amount?' I demanded.

'Seven hundred and fifty,' Santos said.

Frankie crouched in front of the screen, turned it towards me so Santos couldn't see it. Then he looked up at me.

'Do it,' I said.

He turned his head as far as he could, then mouthed to me, 'The code.'

I remembered the folded piece of paper in my pocket. I tightened my grip on the nine-mill., pointed it at Santos, took out the paper.

Santos shook his head. 'They wrote it down,' he said to himself in disbelief.

I pointed the gun at his head. This was the dangerous time. I knew they could try shooting, take us out, go for the code before

we destroyed it. I held the paper with the very tips of the fingers on my free right hand. It fluttered in my fingers like a butterfly's wings. I moved my arm right over the side of the platform. The river rushed blindingly below me. I pretended to drop my arm, let go of the code.

'*No!*' Santos cried out.

'That easy,' I said.

It might buy us a little space.

I crouched next to Frankie, who used the laptop screen as a shield as he punched in the code. He tapped out $750,000.00.

'Your bank code and account number?' I asked Santos.

He told us, Frankie's fingers typing, typing some more.

I heard the first intimations of the faint chugging coming along the river. I pretended not to notice.

'Now,' I said loudly to my brother, knowing that time was very short.

Frankie pressed Enter.

The figure on our screen decreased. Santos watched his own screen intently, totally absorbed. Ellen became aware of the noise upriver, but Santos's face filled with sudden delight. The money must have appeared. The wonders of on-line banking, Swiss style.

'True to your word,' Santos said to me.

'Not quite,' I said.

'What the hell is *that*?' Ellen shouted.

The chugging became the noise of an engine. A boat engine. Unseen, a ghostly noise coming from the river.

Santos rushed back to Ruth's side. He prodded his gun into her stomach.

'Davey?' Frankie said.

'Same deal, Santos,' I shouted above the increasing drone. 'One change.'

'I'll kill her now,' Santos said.

'What the hell are you doing?' Frankie cried.

There were no lights on the small boat, just as I had suggested.

I moved forward, my arms outstretched. With my right hand, I held out the code. I stepped closer to Santos.

'Davey, for Christ's sake,' Frankie said.

I began to reel off the four groups of four numbers, praying that my memorising of the sequence in the hospital wouldn't let me down.

'5603,' I shouted. 'Look at the code, Santos. 2167. 9865. 4618.'

The noise of the engine increased; the boat appeared off the end of the quay.

'I'll *kill* her,' Santos said.

I crumpled the paper in my right hand. I stuffed it into my mouth, chewed, swallowed.

'Oh, Jesus; oh, Jesus,' Frankie cried behind me.

'5603,' I repeated. 'That's the first four. You probably know that by now, Santos. But can you remember the rest? Twelve random numbers. End to end. Nine hundred billion to one. Take your shot. Go for it. But I don't think you will.'

I retreated two paces. Kicked Frankie's laptop into the river.

'If you want the code, Santos, you'll want me,' I said.

Frankie was on his feet. 'What're you doing?'

'Think I won't kill her?' Santos threatened, prodding his gun into Ruth.

'You want the money,' I said. 'I'm not surprised. It is your money. If you want it, you want me.' I turned to the river. The engine suddenly cut out; the boat drifted towards the end of the quay.

Santos put the gun to Ruth's head.

I put my own gun to my head. 'Kill her and you lose the money,' I told him. My insides were raw, my nerves fraying, on the point of failing.

Hang on. Back yourself.

'Train?' I called into the fog.

'Davey?' his booming voice echoed over the water.

I felt my gun pressed into my temple, the cold round ring of the barrel tip. 'Same deal, one change,' I told Santos. 'They go,

you keep me. If I don't give you the code, you kill me, any way you choose. You know you can torture it out of me. But believe me, I'll tell you first. Somehow, I just don't trust you, Santos.'

'It's insane,' Frankie protested. 'He'll kill you the moment he has the code.'

'Frankie, there aren't better odds. Two out of three ain't bad.' I looked at Ruth, remembered the child she carried. 'Three out of four. It's your kid.'

'I don't want you to do it,' Frankie said.

'Listen to your little brother for once.' I turned back to Santos. 'Your call, Santos. They go on the boat and I go with you.'

I started into his face, could see that he was tempted. Suddenly Ellen let Ruth go and turned her gun away from me.

She turned it on Santos.

'You're not that foolish,' Santos said.

'Let go of her,' Ellen told him. 'You're right, Dave. I'm that same bloody girl.'

Santos pressed the gun just beneath Ruth's eye. 'I'll fire in ten seconds.'

'And in eleven you'll be dead,' Ellen said.

'What the hell is going on?' Frankie asked.

I glanced at Ellen and saw the trace of a smile on her face.

'One thing I beat you at, Killer,' she said.

*Marksmanship.*

Expertly she steeled herself and pulled the trigger, her gun aimed at Santos's head. There was a click, a delay as the firing mechanism jammed.

'Sorry, Dave,' she said.

In that instant, Santos fired.

Flame spat out of his gun. Ellen's head gashed, opened just above her right ear. She spun, sprayed blood, arcs of it spinning like locks of hair. She hit the platform, her gun swallowed by the river.

I crouched, knees cracking. Fired at Santos, missed. Ellen's

hand opened, fingers like petals, within them the key to Ruth's handcuffs. I dived on the wood, rolled. Santos's next shot slammed into the platform; splinters pierced the skin on my face.

Ellen's eyes, dead still. Blood spilled from her mouth.

I rolled behind her. Santos fired again. The shot thudded into Ellen's body.

Ruth kicked Santos, flailing backward like a crazed horse. He screamed out, dropped the gun. Still the fog swirled. Ruth ran towards me. Frankie was at my side, took the keys for the cuffs from Ellen's body. I fired at Santos, missed, got a bead on him again. He rolled, a silhouette in the fog.

I had to finish it now, or it would never end.

Ruth ran past me. I tried to cover her with my body. Where was he? My eyes were burning in the fog washing in off the river. The world I could see grew smaller. Where was Santos?

Footsteps. Nearer. An explosion in the fog. Something winged me. A mallet hammering my right arm. Jesus, it hurt. Flesh wound. Santos was closer. I fired into nothingness. Fired again, left, swivelled right, fired.

The fog parted. He dived for me, his eyes crazed, yellow, green.

I wanted to kill him. He wanted me alive. I thudded backward – my head belted the wood, crunching the back of my skull. A crimson mist of pain. He was on me. I withdrew into my body. Fight it, don't black out. My gun was now infinitely heavy, uncontrollable; it fell from my left hand. I heard the gulp of the water taking it. Santos's gun was in my eye, blotting out everything.

He had me.

I couldn't see Frankie. But I heard him yell. Santos flew sideways with the impact. He tried to turn the gun on Frankie. I felt an explosion. Heard it. Saw nothing. The gun was trapped between their bodies. Neither cried out – how could it have missed?

Still they rolled, another half-turn, in unison. I glimpsed why. Frankie had the handcuffs on his wrist. He clamped the other bracelet on Santos's.

Still the mist of pain in my eyes. I tried to get up, heard myself scream, *'Frankie!'*

Another shot. Frankie screamed. His mouth a wide black hole. He'd handcuffed Santos to himself. They rolled into the river.

Two bodies, joined. Falling.

I crawled to the edge, tried to shake off the fainting sensation.

The river ran impossibly fast – black, molten, tarry. The current washed them. The river took them away.

I tumbled off the platform.

I couldn't breathe. The shock of the frozen water crushed my chest. Consciousness sharpened as I asphyxiated. The river spun me around in the fog. Took my legs, invaded my mouth. A huge black frozen hand tossing me as it pleased. I thrashed my limbs, three of them – my right arm useless, winged, bleeding. I felt the immense undertow of the water. It dragged me beneath.

I knew this river. It could dump you where it wished. It was stronger than any man. But I loved my brother, I was going to fight it for him.

Please don't let me fail. I've failed in so much. Let me succeed in this.

I spat out the river's chemicals and poisons, took a massive breath. Submerged myself.

Just blackness below, but the river wasn't empty. It hid mysterious things, carried them below its surface, the detritus of eight million people. It flushed bottles, newspapers, tyres, suicides through the city.

Now it carried two brothers. And the man who would kill them.

My hands grappled blindly. Nothing.

I couldn't conceive of life without Frankie, wouldn't want to live it.

My lungs burst. I kicked for the surface, saw the monstrous wharf post a fraction of a second before my forehead cracked dead centre against it.

# Chapter Forty-Five

When they return, they will make me confess.

That's what they hope.

Now they watch.

They keep me in the dark – their standard practice – and the only thing I can see is the gleam of their eyes, taking turns, peering at me from the spyhole in the door.

A point of light flares. Like a match being struck.

It disappears; flares again.

On-off, light-darkness, repeated over and over until the room is finally engulfed in brightness.

My eyes swim; I turn, trying to hide from the light, but powerful halogen spots are recessed into the ceiling in each corner. They illuminate something else: what has already happened in this cell; it is documented in cracks and dents on the walls, where men have banged their heads, kicked out with bare feet, tried to scratch through the brickwork with their fingernails. No one has escaped.

Without warning the door edges open and they step in, circling me as if I were a wild animal. They glance at each other, wait for the signal – *Go, go, go* – then pounce, restraining my arms, injecting me against infection from the river – that's what they tell me. God, it could be anything, mainlined H or codeine. I know that it's happened in police stations. The needle-tip

punches a small pit in my skin, then spears through to the subcutaneous. The plunger on the syringe slides down, and the dizziness returns. They say it is good for me. I am too weak to resist.

And still they won't tell me about Frankie.

My forehead has stopped bleeding. It scabs, pulling the parted skin on either side tight. I try to reconstruct the past, but I don't know how long I've been here.

Frankie went into the river. I went in after him. He's gone, I'm here.

My heart is breaking.

I rush at the cell door, smashing at it again and again with my fist.

'*Frankie?* Where *are* you?'

I feel drugged, dizzy on two faltering feet. I think it's me shouting these things.

I'm in a paper forensic suit, not knowing what tests they have done. I've ripped off the sleeves. I don't know why. My flesh crawls.

'*Frankie?*' I scream out.

This echo in the cell soon dies.

I sink on to the mattress. Darkness wells inside me, reaches up my throat, nostrils, fills my eyes like rising river water.

I am woken by the cell door being flung open. Leybourne.

'Where is he?' he shouts at me, the lights in the ceiling glinting off his glasses.

'I want my brother,' I shout back.

'Both of you,' he replies, 'you've set this up. You've murdered Ellen Ross.'

Ellen's face, her head gashed and bleeding, rises in my mind; she says: *Who am I to you?* I try to tell her that it's me, Dave, Killer Kilkenny. No words come. I realise she is dead. *Another body on the battlefield whose rings can be robbed.*

Someone is behind Leybourne. I can't see who it is. A man. He says, 'We don't believe the girl or the black man.'

'Let me see Ruth.'

'You're not seeing anyone.' Leybourne advances, shoves me against the wall. My vertebrae scrape down the rough brick. My eyes judder with the pain.

'Where is he, Kilkenny?' Leybourne asks.

'The river.' I say. He was in the river. He can't still be in the river and be alive; I can't have failed in saving him.

'Bullshit,' shouts Leybourne. 'We found the body.'

My mouth falls open. Nothing comes out. My life is frozen.

'Santos's body,' Leybourne adds. 'Still handcuffed. One wrist. The other bracelet open. Where the fuck is your brother?'

Hope surges in me. It breaks my face into a smile, and I watch frame by frame as Leybourne pulls back his fist and fires the punch. I curl up against the beating to come.

He's still alive.

I rock on the mattress, like when I was a boy, like when we were boys.

'He abandoned you,' Leybourne says.

'He *saved* me,' I cry back.

I pray that Frankie has planned this. I pray that he's beaten them all.

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This has been my confession. My confession, Frankie, made for you. Made so that you understand there is nothing that remains unforgiven. So that you will come back to us if you can. My e-mail address has not changed; even though a year has now passed I still check my messages twice a day, at different times, when the urge to look again becomes too great. You can bounce your text off a satellite, then off another, speeding silently 24,000 miles above the surface of the planet, and no one will be able to trace you; they will not know.

The police had to release all of us soon after that night. Their threats of charges, harbouring a fugitive, obstructing justice, rang hollow in the face of my pleas to let me have my fugitive back so that I could tell him some of what has always remained unsaid between us.

Dreadful rumours about you are blown by the winds to the door of our bar. I listen to all of them, force myself to. The sightings, up North, back in Ireland, grave-digging in France. Someone met someone who says our Frankie is in South Africa. A beach bar in Tahiti, island-hopping in the Caribbean. Everywhere someone we know goes, there you are seen. Everyone wants to share in your mystery. They all add to our pain.

I've given up the law. I think that would please you.

Dad gets around with a stick, which he hates, and constantly tells me what I am doing wrong in the running of the bar. But Kilkenny's has never

done better, can you imagine that? Dad and I argue more than ever, and love each other more as well. We share each other's loss.

Upstairs, young Francis grows apace. Ruth never allows anyone to call him Frankie. We have agreed that we can only wait another year at most, and if you're not back, we will marry. I can't wait any longer for my best man. Afterwards, at least, your son will have a legal reason -- if not a biological one -- to call me Dad.

Does he look like you? For me, it's too soon to tell. Ruth says -- and I don't know what to make of this -- Ruth says that he looks like *us*.

When your child cries at night, Dad holds him over his shoulder, rocks him and sings. He sings 'My Wild Irish Rose'; he stares at the other side of the river, looking for Mum.

Train, of course, dotes on the child, and we never have need of a baby-sitter with him around. He helps me out in the bar, calms me down when Dad and I are about to fight. Still I have to be on at him about his weight. Still he sneaks off behind our backs and gorges himself on the worst junk food in Cable Street.

And what of me?

I just wait.

I sometimes sit on one of the cast-iron benches on the riverbank. My eyes drift downstream with the current, towards where you left me. Now and then my mind plays tricks; the bobbing objects on their journey to the sea resolve into the back of a head, your head, and I want to dive in. I want one last chance to succeed where I failed.

Your body has not turned up. The police use this as incriminating evidence against us all. For the river gives up its dead. It's only the exceptional body that is not found. That's what they don't understand. How cruelly exceptional your life ultimately was.

I bring up your child as my own. I struggle with what I should tell little Francis when the time comes. No one outside the family will ever know the truth. Our family has aired enough secrets for all of our lifetimes.

This one we will keep; Dad, Ruth, Train and me.

But should we?

Every time the 'You Have New Messages' Icon appears , and whenever someone knocks on the bar door, especially if the sun is setting along the

western bend of the river, and all I can see with my squinting eyes is a slowly moving silhouette, I am forced again to wonder.

I wonder and I hope and I pray.

This is the effect you've had on your little brother, Frankie. On a case-hardened defence brief who believed he had lost his curiosity, his optimism and his hope. I have reclaimed all three -- and am tormented by them in turn.

I often think this is your special gift to me.

You broke my heart with the legal document. We found it with your papers as you must have guessed. In the eventuality you 'disappeared and sent no letter, fax or e-mail for a period of one year'. You gave me a power of attorney over everything you once possessed. I don't want your power of attorney, I just want you back.

Now I must pause. Someone is rapping on the bar door.

I obey the new discipline of my life, and wait in hope.

Frankie, do you hear?

I wait.

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